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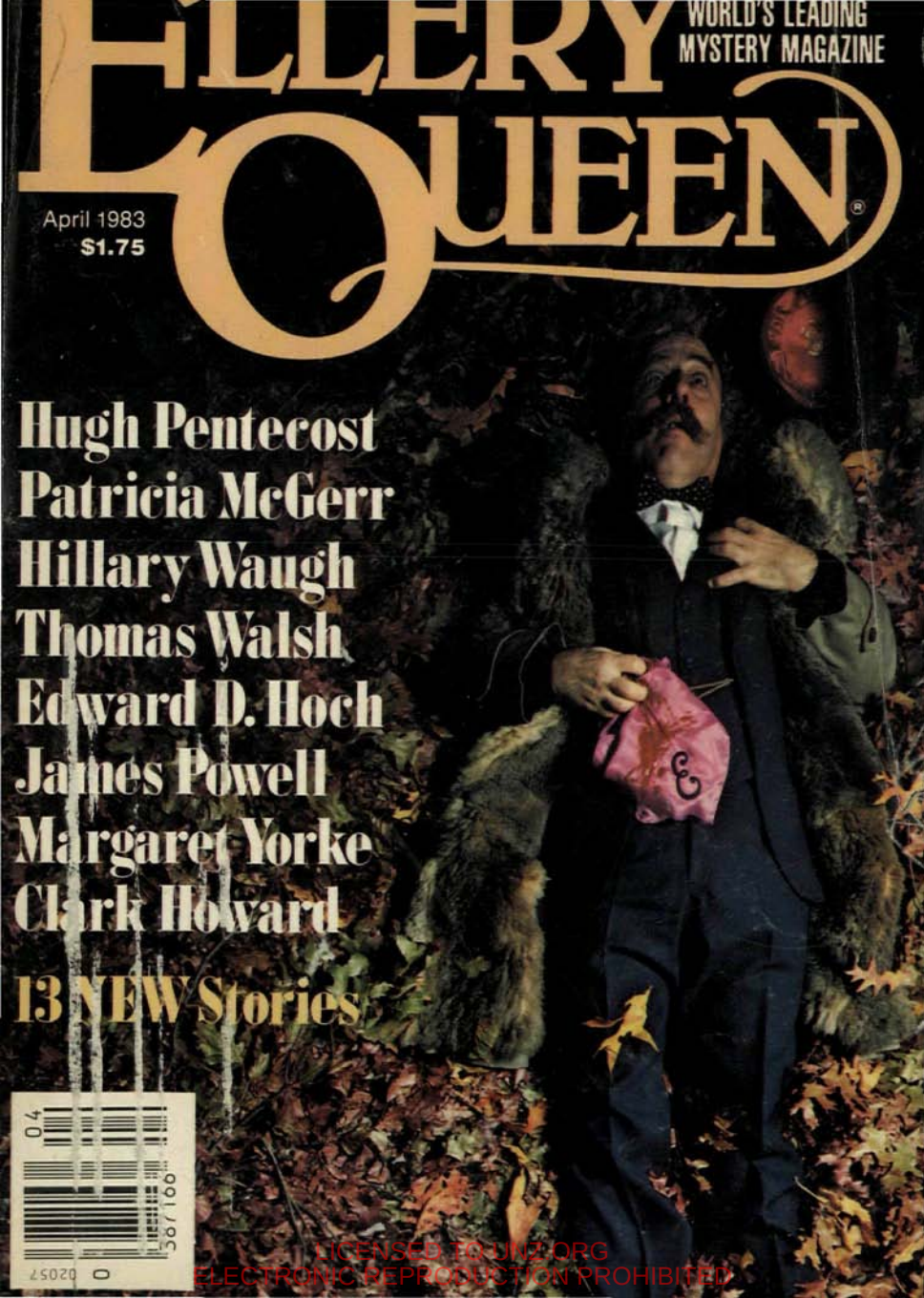

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6 **The Spy Who Sat in Judgment** / Edward D. Hoch

22 **Always Rather a Prig** / Margaret Yorke

30 **A Bad Influence** / Hugh Pentecost

44 **After All These Years** / Jeffry Scott

53 **Puerto Rican Blues** / Clark Howard

66 **Harry Houdini's Trousers** / Jean Darling

77 **Softie** / Robert M. Davis

90 **The Second Man** / Thomas Walsh

102 **Have You Seen This Woman?** / Barbara Callahan

115 **We Have Your Wife** / Patricia McGerr

120 **The End of What?** / Robert Twohy

133 **Some Explaining To Do** / Hillary Waugh

141 **The Scarlet Totem** / James Powell

82 **EQ Mystery Newsletter** / R. E. Porter & Chris Steinbrunner

87 **The Jury Box** / Jon L. Breen

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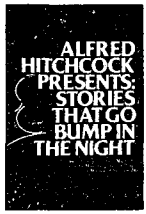

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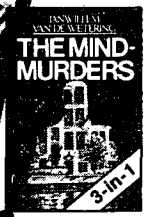

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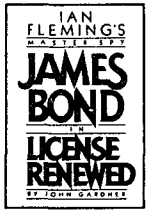

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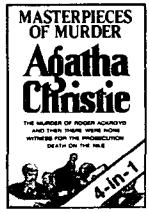

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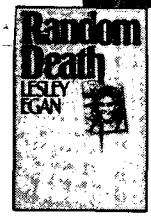

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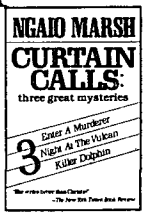

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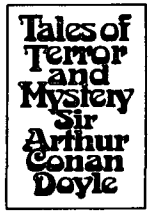

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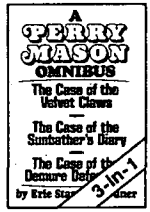

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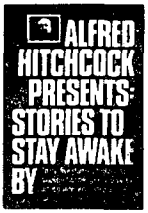

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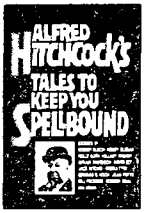

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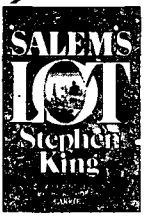

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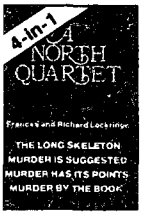

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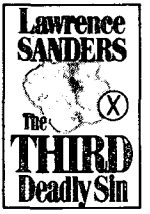

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He was not coming out of retirement to go to Australia on a spy mission, Rand assured Hastings . . . This was something a bit more delicate and difficult than a spy mission, Hastings explained . . .

THE SPY WHO SAT IN JUDGMENT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Hastings leaned across the desk, stared hard at Rand, and asked, "Have you ever been to Australia?"

"Never, as you well know. You have my service record on the desk in front of you."

"Yes, well, I was thinking of that time in Hong Kong. I thought you might have taken a side trip down to Sydney."

The conversation was exasperating Rand. "That would have been some side trip—it's more than three thousand miles away, one way. Suppose we cut the banter and you tell me what you want this time. I'm not coming out of retirement to go to Australia on some sort of spy mission, if that's what you have in mind."

"No, no—it's nothing like that, Rand. Something a bit more delicate and difficult than a spy mission, I'm afraid. We're convening a secret board of inquiry to sit in judgment on one of our people out there. Someone from London must attend and I'd like it to be you."

"Why me?"

"You're retired. An old warhorse with no ax to grind."

"That makes me feel vital. What is it? Someone get caught cozying up to the enemy?"

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"The opposite, I'm afraid," Hastings said distastefully. "A man was being questioned and he died. They say our chap was torturing or beating him and the man had a heart attack. Damned messy, and we can hardly turn it over to the local police."

"I thought those things were usually buried and forgotten," Rand said with a touch of irony.

"You know better than that. If we covered up something like this and the press found out about it—"

"Isn't a secret board of inquiry a cover-up?"

"Not when they reach a verdict. Then everything's in the files, even though it's classified. If need be, the Prime Minister can always declassify it and prove that we did our job."

"And if the board of inquiry finds our man guilty? What's to be done with him?"

Hastings swiveled around in his chair to stare out the window at the Thames, and for just an instant Rand felt it was seven years ago, when he was still head of Concealed Communications. The same gestures, the same governmental righteousness. "Oh, I imagine he'd be allowed to commit suicide."

Rand decided to go to Australia.

Two nights later, Rand's plane landed at Kingsford-Smith Airport in the suburb of Mascot, just south of Sydney. It had been a long, tiring journey and he wished he'd brought his wife Leila along for companionship. Twenty-four hours on the plane, plus another ten hours' time difference between London and Sydney, made it almost a day and a half since he'd taken off from Heathrow in the noonday sun. Now, at ten o'clock the following night, he wanted nothing more than a few hours' sound sleep without the constant humming of jet engines and the superficial solicitude of the stewardesses.

At his hotel in downtown Sydney there was a message awaiting him from Felix Dupster, MI5's chief of station in Australia. Rand decided he could wait till morning before returning the call.

He'd changed into his pajamas and was about to climb into bed when he heard a soft knock on the door. Thinking it was the bellman returning with some neglected instructions to pass along, he opened the door a crack and saw a tanned young woman in a white cotton dress. In his exhausted state, his first thought was that her costume and her suntan were strange for the middle of February. But then he remembered it was summer in Australia.

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"Mr. Rand?" she asked. "I'm sorry to bother you like this but I really must speak to you."

"I'm sorry," he began. "I'm afraid I have a very bad case of jet lag—"

"Please! I'll only take a few minutes."

"How do you know my name?" he asked suspiciously. Hastings had impressed upon him the need for secrecy.

"You're here to sit in judgment on my husband. I know your name."

Rand opened the door a bit wider. "Come in, Mrs. Mowbray. But you must realize I can't discuss the case."

She entered the room, but only as far as necessary. She stood with her back to the closed door and said, "My husband is innocent. If you find him guilty I don't know what they'll do to him. I'm afraid they might kill him."

"I'm not a judge, Mrs. Mowbray. I came out from London only to serve on a board of inquiry with several others. I assure you that your husband will receive every fairness."

"They can't let him talk," she said. "They can't let him tell the truth."

"The truth will come out. Now I must insist that you leave. I haven't slept soundly in two nights."

"All right," she said. "I think I can trust you." She held out a tentative hand. "My name is Karen Mowbray. If there's anything I can do to help David, please let me know."

"I promise to do that," Rand said. "I promise he'll receive a fair hearing."

She slipped out as quickly as she'd entered. A handsome woman, Rand decided. David Mowbray was a lucky man, or at least he had been till recently.

He slept well in the big hotel bed and awakened refreshed, a bit horrified to see that it was nearly ten o'clock. After ordering breakfast sent to the room, he telephoned Felix Dupster at the number he'd been given.

"It's good hearing from you, Mr. Rand," the voice on the other end said. "I thought you might phone last evening. I hope your flight wasn't too tedious."

"I survived. What's the schedule for today?"

"The other members of the board of inquiry are already assembled. We're waiting for you."

"Very well. Where are you?"

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"My driver will pick you up at your hotel in one hour. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly."

"I'll meet you at the dock and we'll take the hydrofoil up to Manly, one of our northern suburbs. It's a fifteen-minute journey, and a car will be waiting for us. I felt it best that the inquiry be held at the house which serves as our headquarters here."

"Of course."

"I'll look forward to meeting you, Mr. Rand."

Felix Dupster was a tall, slender man who wore a wide-brimmed hat and tinted glasses. They shook hands and Rand followed him aboard the gleaming white hydrofoil. "Saves time this way," the Australian explained. "Traffic's as bad here as it is back in London."

They found seats near the rear and Rand said, "But your home is in Australia?"

Dupster nodded. "The outback, up toward Alice Springs. Can't you tell by this hat I'm wearing? I spent the Sixties in London but I've been back here ever since. I used to hear about you over at Concealed Communications. You made quite a name for yourself."

"I'm retired now."

"Our loss." The hydrofoil started up, pulling away from the pier and heading out toward open water. "Did Hastings fill you in on our problem here?"

"Only the bare facts. I wanted to keep an open mind for the hearing."

"A messy business, God knows. I'll be glad when it's over."

"After I checked in last night I had a visitor," Rand told him. "David Mowbray's wife."

Dupster turned, startled. "What's that? Mowbray's wife came to see you?"

Rand nodded. "I thought it a bit irregular."

"Damned irregular! David Mowbray doesn't have a wife."

Manly was a crowded suburb with a lovely beach, located by a bluff-lined peninsula that served as the north head of the entrance to Sydney harbor. Rand could imagine how guns on those bluffs could have commanded the passage at some distant time in history, though he didn't know that they ever had. The house they drove to was located on the bluffs, set by itself on several acres of wooded land.

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"It's close to the city, yet quite secluded," Felix Dupster explained. "Everything south of Hong Kong is channeled through here. And when there's someone to be interrogated, that's done here, too."

"Is the use of torture ever condoned?" Rand asked.

"Not by me, or by anyone under my command. Whatever Mowbray did, he did it totally without authorization."

They pulled up in front of the house and were immediately met by a security guard. Inside, the main downstairs room had been given over to secretaries at electric typewriters and computer terminals. "It's functional," Dupster said, as if reading Rand's thoughts. "Come along. The others are waiting upstairs."

Rand was ushered into a wood-paneled conference room on the second floor where two men and an attractive woman in her thirties sat casually around a long table. Dupster quickly introduced them. "This is Reggie Greene, our communications man, and Hilda Osburn, in charge of photo analysis. I chose them for the board of inquiry with you because they've had the least contact with Mowbray and can be the most objective." Dupster had removed his wide-brimmed hat in the house, revealing a nearly bald head. By contrast, Greene's youthful haircut covered his ears. The woman's soft dark hair was set off by a smartly tailored suit worn over a white blouse with a high neckline.

"They've arranged to stay here overnight, but you may return to your hotel if you wish," Dupster told him. Then, remembering the other man in the room, he quickly added, "This is Simon Blakely, our paymaster. He'll be a witness."

Rand shook hands with the thin older man. "I'd like a word with Mowbray before we get under way. Is he available?"

"Certainly." Dupster led him to a small adjoining room where a dark-haired young man sat smoking a pipe.

"You'd be Mr. Rand from London," he said, rising to shake hands.

"Sorry we have to meet under these circumstances. I don't relish the task, believe me. I thought it might be easier for both of us if we spoke for a moment before the formalities begin."

"I appreciate that, sir." If he was nervous he showed no sign of it.

"Do you have anything to tell me, off the record?"

"No, sir. I'll tell my story before the board."

"Last night I was visited by a woman who said she was your wife. The records show you're unmarried."

David Mowbray's placid expression cracked for just an instant.

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Then he recovered and said, "That would be Karen. We've been living together and I suppose she feels we're as good as married."

His reaction puzzled Rand a bit, but he could think of no further questions at the moment. "All right," he said. "Good luck."

"Thank you, sir."

Rand followed Dupster back to the conference room and took his place behind the long table with the others, sitting on one end next to Hilda Osburn.

"I'm not comfortable in this role," she confided to Rand.

"None of us is," he assured her. "But it's only a board of inquiry."

"You know better than that."

Felix Dupster opened the door to the adjoining room and David Mowbray entered. After Mowbray was seated facing the board members, Dupster reached over to turn on a tape recorder. Then he began speaking in a careful monotone.

"This board of inquiry has been convened to look into the circumstances surrounding the death of Eric Natuna. Let the record show that the object of the inquiry, David Mowbray, has waived his right to have an attorney present. Now then, Mr. Mowbray, could you fill us in on the background of the dead man, beginning with the first time you had contact with him?"

"Certainly," Mowbray said, speaking in a clear, firm voice. "I first met Eric Natuna about two years ago while on assignment in Kuala Lumpur. He was a Malaysian with some British blood, a man in his late forties who owned a couple of surplus army transport planes and made his living running a little air-freight service among the islands. He picked up a great deal of information on his hops and he seemed a natural for the type of information we're always seeking. I obtained approval from Mr. Dupster, our chief of station, to place him on a small retainer. Mr. Blakely, our paymaster, handled the payments in the usual manner."

"Just what is that?" Rand interrupted to ask.

"Money laundered through a Hong Kong bank. As I say, it was small to start with, but it grew larger as the man proved more useful to us. He became involved in the opium trade, flying out large consignments of drugs to various parties. We were able to use his information in a number of ways. His business started bringing him to Australia, especially to Darwin in the north. Blakely went with me once to meet him in Darwin, and shortly after that we had a nasty turn. One of Natuna's planes crashed in the Timor Sea and he was reported killed. But two weeks later he contacted me to say

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he was still alive. At about that same time Mr. Dupster started growing suspicious of some of the information he'd been feeding us."

"I should take over the narrative for a moment," Dupster said, "since this is an informal hearing. We received word that Natuna was in the pay of Red China. This information surfaced after his supposed death, and it checked out. When Natuna reappeared, wanting to get back on the payroll, we could only assume one thing—that he was, and had been all along, a double agent. I called David in and told him that."

Mowbray puffed on his pipe and took up the story once again. "I was the one who recruited Natuna and he was my responsibility. I promised to question him and that's what I did. I arranged to meet him at a safe house in Darwin, and Blakely went with me. I decided to question him alone while Blakely waited in the next room. During the questioning he died, apparently of a heart attack."

"I'd recommend we hear from Mr. Blakely at this point," Rand suggested.

Simon Blakely was a tall, somber man who walked with a bit of a stoop. He rose from the chair he'd been occupying at the far side of the room and came forward to replace Mowbray in the informal witness chair.

"Do I get sworn in?" he asked with a wan smile.

Dupster ignored the remark and said, "Tell us about Eric Natuna."

"There's very little to tell. I'd met Natuna on one previous occasion, when I accompanied David to Darwin. He was a little man whose features were more oriental than British, but he spoke very good English. This time David seemed nervous about the meeting and had me wait in the adjoining room while he questioned the man. After about twenty minutes I heard noises. There might have been a gasp or a muffled scream, and then there was the sound of a falling body. I went to see what was wrong." He paused.

"And?" Dupster prodded.

"Eric Natuna was on the floor. He was dead. David was standing over him."

"Were any weapons visible, and by that I include blackjacks, electrodes, wires of any sort?"

"Not that I saw, no."

"What was done with the body?"

"We couldn't call the police, for several reasons. Natuna was supposed to be dead already, for one thing, and we would have had to explain the involvement of British Intelligence—a very sticky mat-

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ter at best. Then too, David admitted to me he'd been a bit rough on the man. He was afraid a police investigation would uncover bruises and lacerations which might have been a contributing cause of death. In any event, I agreed to help dispose of the body. It was dumped in Darwin harbor the same night. As you know, when we returned to Sydney I thought it best to report everything that had transpired."

"And very wise of you, too," Dupster agreed. He turned to the panel of judges, letting his eyes rest on each of them in turn. Reggie Greene, the communications man, had been silent through the entire testimony and Hilda Osburn had barely spoken. Only Rand had really joined in the questioning.

David Mowbray was resuming the witness chair when a wall telephone near the door began flashing a red light. Dupster looked annoyed but went to answer it. "Don't you know we're not to be disturbed?" he barked. Then he settled down to listen to the voice at the other end. After a few seconds he said, "I'll be right down."

"What is it?" Greene asked from his seat.

"We'll have to adjourn for a few moments. There seems to be a slight disturbance at the front entrance. Rand, could you come with me, please?"

Rand followed him out the door and Dupster said, "It's that woman again, the one who visited you last night claiming to be Mowbray's wife. Perhaps you can talk to her."

"What does she want?"

"To see Mowbray, of course. Claims if we don't allow her to see him she'll go to the press and raise an uproar that we're holding him prisoner here."

"How did she find this place?"

The bald man shrugged. "Mowbray told her, I suppose. A breach of security regulations, of course, but one more wouldn't bother him."

"You're convinced he's guilty?"

"Oh, of course! I'm just not quite certain what he's guilty of."

A security guard and one of the secretaries were attempting to keep Karen Mowbray under control when Dupster and Rand reached her. She was just inside the front door, talking loudly and insisting on being taken to her husband at once. When she spotted Felix Dupster she shifted her attack to him: "I know what you're doing to him here—you're killing him! You're condemning him for something he didn't do!"

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Rand stepped forward quickly, fearing she might try lunging at Dupster. "Let's go somewhere and talk this over," he suggested.

The security guard steered them to an unused office off the entranceway. "I came to see you last night," she told Rand, "but you wouldn't help me."

"I don't understand what help I can give you. We're conducting an informal hearing here. David is right upstairs, in perfect health."

"But not for long, I'll wager." She turned her fury on Dupster once again. "You're planning to kill him, aren't you? Or force him to kill himself."

Rand turned to Dupster. "Perhaps we can settle this quite quickly by allowing Mrs. Mowbray to see her husband for a moment."

"He's not her husband," Dupster growled.

"That shows how much you know!" she responded, eyes alight now with righteous fire. "We were married last Saturday in Brisbane. We flew up there for the weekend. Must I produce the marriage certificate to convince you?"

"Don't you have a room upstairs where they could see each other?" Rand suggested quietly.

"I'll see about it," Dupster promised, heading for the door. "Give me a minute and then bring her up to the room where you met him earlier. I'll clear the others out of the way."

When they were alone Rand asked, "Why did you choose last weekend to be married?"

"It was David's idea. He knew this business was coming to a head and he wanted something to cling to, I suppose."

"How much has he told you about what happened in Darwin?"

"Only the bare facts—that the man apparently died of a heart attack. Since he was already believed dead anyway, I don't see where any harm's been done."

"Very well, come along. But try to impress upon him the importance of telling us the full story. In my room last night you said he wouldn't be allowed to tell the whole truth. I came all the way from London to hear the whole truth, and I insist upon hearing it. Neither Felix Dupster nor anyone else can silence him, I [illegible] you."

"And can you get him off?"

"It depends upon what he's done," Rand told her. "What he's really done."

They went upstairs then, walking along the silent corridor to the empty conference room. He couldn't help wondering if Dupster had the others hidden away in closets. "Where is he?" she asked.

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"Through that door. I'll wait here."

She opened the connecting door and went in, starting to close it behind her. Then, after a few seconds, he heard her scream.

Rand was at the half closed door, yanking it open. Karen Mowbray stood frozen in terror, staring down at her husband in the chair.

"He's dead!" she gasped. "You've killed him!"

That was when Rand saw the slim bloody dagger on the floor and the smear of red across David Mowbray's chest.

"What's been going on here?" Rand demanded of Felix Dupster as Karen's screams brought the others running. "Who killed this man?"

It was Reggie Greene who attempted an answer. "I don't see how anyone could have, old chap. Felix came up and told him to go into the other room because his wife wanted to see him. Mowbray did so and that was that. We all cleared out."

"Why?"

"I didn't want her seeing them," Dupster explained. "She knows you're on the board of inquiry and you see how she's been bothering you. I didn't want her doing the same thing with Reggie and Miss Osburn."

Hilda Osburn snorted. "We're so formal all of a sudden. What do we do with *this* body, Felix? Dump it in the sea like Natuna?"

"There'll be no more bodies dumped in the sea," Rand said with all the authority he could muster.

"There's nothing impossible about his death," Hilda Osburn remarked. Rand turned to her, noting the pale skin above the scoop neckline of her blouse, contrasting sharply with Karen's deep tan. "Any of us could have entered that room through the other door off the hall."

"Rand and the lady were approaching down the hall," Reggie pointed out.

"She's right," Rand agreed. "If the killer was doing the deed while we were coming upstairs, he or she could have gone out the hallway door as soon as we passed it and entered the conference room."

"He might have stabbed himself," Felix Dupster said. "Though he seemed very calm."

"He wasn't calm," Hilda Osburn told them. "He was smoking his pipe and he only smoked when he was nervous."

"He didn't kill himself!" Karen shouted. "If he did, you forced him to! David had too much to live for!"

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"Get her out of here," Dupster said quietly, and the task fell to Simon Blakely.

"Will you contact London?" Hilda Osburn asked Rand.

"London is half a world away. We'll try to handle it here."

"How, old chap?" Greene asked. The corpse of a co-worker seemed to bother him very little.

"We'll continue with the board of inquiry," Rand suggested.

"The object of the inquiry is dead," Dupster reminded him.

"So he is, but maybe now we can still get the truth. I'll give it one hour. Then we call in the local police."

They trooped back into the conference room. Blakely saw to it that Karen was cared for by one of the secretaries downstairs and then he joined them.

"One of you killed Mowbray," Rand announced simply, facing them across the table. "It wasn't suicide."

"Why not?" Dupster wanted to know.

"The wound was deep and probably hit the heart. If he stabbed himself, he couldn't have pulled the dagger free."

"A reflex action," Dupster suggested.

"But why kill himself when his wife of just a few days was on her way up to see him? And where did he get the dagger?"

"It's a type we issue for certain clandestine operations. The thin blade goes in easily, and then it's withdrawn so the wound will bleed and hasten death."

"So the weapon was available to any of you. I think we can rule out the secretaries downstairs. They'd have been seen coming up here. No, one of you feared Mowbray's wife might persuade him to tell the truth, so you killed him."

Reggie Greene blustered a bit. "I think we heard the truth from David's lips before he died."

Rand turned to Simon Blakely, the paymaster. "You seem to be our star witness now that Mowbray's dead. Where were you when he was stabbed?"

"I was here with the others when Felix came up and told us David's wife demanded to see him. David admitted they'd been secretly married, and Felix escorted him into the next room, closing the door behind him. He told us to scatter so Karen Mowbray wouldn't see us and start lecturing us about David."

Rand nodded, accepting it for the moment. "You made two trips to Darwin with the dead man. That seems a bit unusual to me. Two men traveling together are twice as easy to spot as one man."

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The paymaster took a deep breath. "If you must know, I was assuring myself that this man Natuna really existed."

"Oh?"

"I'm responsible for paying several dozen agents and contract employees scattered throughout the East Indies and Micronesia. By the very nature of the work most of them never surface or come to Sydney. They're mere names to me—often fictitious code names or, more likely, bank-account numbers. The possibilities for fraud are endless, and of course I am the one who is ultimately responsible to London."

"You had reason to believe David Mowbray was running an agent who didn't exist?"

Blakely glanced at the others. "Yes," he replied.

"On what basis?"

Felix Dupster interrupted with a growl. "This line of questioning is utterly without merit."

"London might have a different opinion," Rand remarked drily. "Please continue, Mr. Blakely."

"Well, such things have happened from time to time and we always have to check up, you know. I heard that David was meeting Natuna in Darwin and I asked to go along. Later, when we heard Natuna was dead, I naturally stopped the monthly payments. Then David told me he was alive after all, and I went with him on the second trip to assure myself it was the same person. It was."

Rand turned back to Felix Dupster. "And yet you feared Natuna might be a double agent."

"The Red Chinese were paying him. That much we know."

"What sort of intelligence were you getting from him?"

"Photographs, mainly. A Russian submarine refueling at an island base off Malaya. A Chinese diplomat dining in secret with a couple of Frenchmen. His air-freight service brought him in contact with all sorts of people, and he was a wizard with a camera."

"Photographs can be faked," Rand pointed out.

"These weren't."

Rand turned back to Simon Blakely. "You say his payments were laundered through a Hong Kong bank?"

"Mowbray told you that, but it's true enough. It was standard procedure."

"All right," Rand decided. "I think I have enough information."

"Your hour is running out," Dupster said.

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"I'm going down to talk with Karen Mowbray. That should wind things up."

Rand entered the downstairs room and motioned the secretary out. Karen Mowbray looked up at him, frightened. "What now? Are you going to kill me too?"

"We didn't kill your husband, Karen. You did. You entered that room and slipped the knife from your sleeve and stabbed him in the few seconds before you screamed."

"*No!*"

"I say yes, Karen. No one else could have done it. He was alive when Dupster left the room and you were the only one to have entered after that. We're contacting the authorities."

"Why would I have killed him? I loved him! We'd just been married!"

"You killed him because you thought he'd gone over to the other side. Eric Natuna was a Chinese agent and David was working with him. When you learned that David had sold out his country, it shattered your love for him."

Her face went rigid with anger. "That's the most insane thing I ever heard! David couldn't have sold out to Natuna—he never met the man! The Natuna he contacted in Darwin was a fake. David was conning them to make a little extra money."

Rand felt the tension flow from his body. He had accused her with no proof at all, and had gotten what he needed. It was as simple as that. "I suspected as much," he told her. "And so did the paymaster, Blakely. But I needed to hear it from you."

She was frightened then. "You tricked me. You never thought I did it. I'll deny I said anything."

"Too late for that. All these rooms are bugged."

He didn't wait for her reply. It suddenly occurred to him that the rooms were indeed bugged, and he had no idea who might be listening upstairs. He was out the door, taking the steps two at a time.

Dupster was waiting at the top of the stairs. "Have you finished with her?" he asked Rand.

"I've finished. Is that room bugged?"

"We have a listening device there, and a voice-activated recording."

"Where?"

Dupster's eyes widened. "Down the hall here."

They burst into the narrow closetlike room just as Hilda Osburn

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slipped the earphones off her head. She was reaching for a pistol on the desk at her side when Rand grabbed her.

Later Rand told Felix Dupster, "I knew at once that she had killed David Mowbray, but it took me a bit longer to work out the motive. They were partners in the scheme, of course, running one or more fake agents and having the agents' pay laundered through a Hong Kong bank account where it eventually filtered back into their pockets. The pictures the supposed agent Eric Natuna furnished were clever fakes, of course, and they'd never have passed muster without the connivance of your head of photo analysis—who just happened to be Hilda Osburn."

Dupster nodded sadly. "I'll make an immediate check on all of Mowbray's other agents, especially those who were furnishing us with photographs."

"He chose real names for his fake agents, of course, and he was doubly unlucky in the case of Natuna. The actual person was killed in a plane crash, and was then revealed to have been a Red Chinese agent. Rather than let things rest, Mowbray compounded his misfortune by attempting to resurrect Natuna in the person of a hired shill who'd played the part once before to fool your paymaster, Blakely. We may never know exactly what happened between the false Natuna and Mowbray. Perhaps the impersonator decided on a little spur-of-the-moment blackmail. In any event, Mowbray beat him a bit and caused his death. Blakely reported it and set in motion this whole business with the board of inquiry. David Mowbray couldn't tell the truth without admitting his part in the scheme to defraud British Intelligence."

"Even granting that Hilda's position in photo analysis made her a likely co-conspirator, how did you know she'd killed him?" Dupster asked.

"You said the board members were staying here overnight, which meant they had extra clothing in the house. When I first met Hilda Osburn her white blouse had a high neckline. After Mowbray's death, she was wearing a different one. Why had she changed blouses? Because she'd gotten blood on the first one when she killed him."

"But what was her motive? To keep him from talking?"

"Partly that, I suppose, but I think it was something more. Just before the killing, Karen arrived to reveal they'd been secretly married, and you brought this news upstairs to the others. Mowbray

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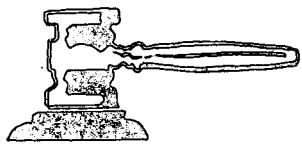
admitted the marriage, in fact. Whatever the relationship between Mowbray and Hilda Osburn, the news of his secret marriage drove her over the line to murder."

"I never guessed there was a romance between them."

"You should have guessed something," Rand said. "She was chosen for the board of inquiry because she was one who'd had the least contact with Mowbray and could be objective. Yet she told us a while ago that he only smoked his pipe when he was nervous. That's not the observation of a casual acquaintance."

Felix Dupster sighed. "You're right, of course. I'm sorry you came all this distance for a board of inquiry that was never finished."

"Perhaps it's just as well," Rand told him. "I'd have made a very poor judge."



DETECTIVERSE

A QUICK STUDY

by ANITA SIEGEL

Jeffery Rand was in bed with a virus.
A panicky Hastings rushed in desirous
Of immediate aid in solving a cipher.
"Help us!" he cried. "It's a matter of life or
Death!" So Rand, though exceedingly sniffy,
Whipped off the answer for him in a jiffy.
How did he do it? "Easy," Rand said.
"You see, I god dis code id by head."

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"I don't suppose she gets taken out to lunch very often," Mildred Fisher said of Miss Primrose, who years ago had been their headmistress at St. Wilhelmina's. Miss Primrose, now nearly eighty, had come to live near Whipton. "We could round up twenty or so old girls," Daphne agreed. "We'll all pay our own and I'll pay for Primmy. It should be quite fun . . ."

What a dull, worthy bunch they were, Miss Primrose mused, looking around at them. How bored their husbands must be. Had she wasted her life? Had she kindled no spark in a single soul? Was there no woman here today who was witty and wise? . . .

ALWAYS RATHER A PRIG

by MARGARET YORKE

"Primmy has come to live near Whipton," said Daphne Blythe when she met Mildred Fisher in Fenwick's for lunch one day. Both were in town for a day's shopping, and they met like this two or three times a year. "We ought to do something about it."

"What?" inquired Mildred. "She must be awfully old."

"Eighty next year—that's all. I used to think she was eighty then," said Daphne, and giggled.

Many years ago Mildred and Daphne had been pupils at St. Wilhelmina's, where Miss Primrose ruled as headmistress. Most girls in those days left St. Wilhelmina's equipped with the School Certificate, as it then was, a basic knowledge of the French language that included some ability to speak it, a sound grounding in the Christian religion, and well mannered. Only a few went on to university, but some, in the brief years before marriage, were capable

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secretaries and others trained as nurses and therapists of various kinds. St. Wilhelmina's had perished in the reign of Miss Primrose's third successor, worn down by rising costs and competition.

"We could have a party for her—give her a good lunch somewhere. We could round up twenty or so old girls, couldn't we? I can think of several who live fairly near. I'm sure the old thing would enjoy it. We can't just leave her there, unacknowledged. And what else can we do? I don't know that Robert—" Daphne's voice trailed away.

She had been going to say that Robert, her barrister husband, might not be enthusiastic if Miss Primrose were asked to dine, and Mildred understood this. Her own Gerald would feel exactly the same.

"A hotel would be better than a hen lunch in one of our houses anyway," she said, imagining the scene in her own. If it were to happen, one might, perforce, get involved with other old St. Wilhelminians—those who lived near enough might take to dropping in, want to use the swimming pool, and so on. It could lead to endless difficulties. Mildred's entertaining was mainly the kind that might lead to some sort of advantage.

"I don't suppose she gets taken out to lunch very often," she added. "It's a good idea, Daphne. Have you got the last school magazine? We could round up some names from that."

So it was that in the next week twenty or so women, none of them young, who lived within forty miles of Whipton and who had been at St. Wilhelmina's but had seldom or never met since, agreed to meet at a riverside hotel to feast their former headmistress.

"Who else is coming?" asked Naomi Kent.

Daphne read out the list of names.

"We'll all pay our own and I'll pay for Primmy," she said. "It should be quite fun. Have you kept up with anyone, Naomi?"

Naomi hadn't. She had been startled when Daphne announced herself on the telephone.

Daphne couldn't remember Naomi at all, apart from her name, but had discovered that she ran a bookshop in the area. A thin, dark girl, she thought, a few years younger than herself—Mildred had told her that.

"I could only come if it was a Wednesday," Naomi said. "I can't leave my shop very easily otherwise. But my assistant can manage for the last hour that morning." By saying this she had expressed willingness to go to the luncheon. She must be quite mad, deliberately setting out to encounter that woman.

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Daphne was saying that Wednesday was the best day for her too. Her Mrs. Blossom came then.

Yes, and polishes the desk in Robert's study, hoovers the room where he sleeps with Daphne, cleans out his bath, thought Naomi.

She had never met the adult Daphne. The mental picture she had of her lover's wife must be inaccurate, surely, after all these years.

None of this was her idea. She didn't want to stir things up. The fact that Daphne had included her in the scheme must prove that she had no suspicion.

The date was arranged, and on a July day Morris 1300s, Allegros, Minis, Ford Escorts, a Jaguar, and a Bentley all converged on the riverside hotel chosen by Daphne for the entertainment of Miss Primrose.

To everyone's surprise, for all her pupils remembered her as tall and of a commanding presence, Miss Primrose was a thin little woman compared with her hostesses. But her white hair was bound round her brow with a snood of black velvet, as all remembered, and her face was quite rosy, for she was healthy and worked daily in her garden despite the torrid heat of that amazing summer.

She gazed round at the assembled women, all well into middle age. Daphne had supplied a list of those attending, which was thoughtful, for some of them Miss Primrose had not found memorable. Daphne, though, she remembered: captain of hockey and captain of tennis, but never head girl. She had once reported a junior girl for smuggling forbidden sweets into school and another time she had led a movement to ostracize a member of the fifth form who had, in Daphne's opinion, let down the school by forgetting her lines in a performance of *The Tempest* before the assembled parents.

What a dull, worthy bunch they were, Miss Primrose mused, sipping gin and tonic. The most interesting and successful of her former pupils were not free to entertain her thus, for they were too busy. There was a hospital matron, a senior civil servant, two doctors. The women here today were, most of them, conscientious wives and mothers who now, with their own families grown up, provided meals on wheels for the elderly, were kindly grandmothers, and pillars of Women's Institutes throughout the land: worthy and good. How bored their husbands must be. Of course, some were widowed, like Ruth Gibbs—brisk and smiling, now a part-time teacher—and Felicity Downes, who looked mournful still, though her husband had died at least ten years ago and he had been rich and stupid, so that her condition now must surely be improved.

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Had she wasted her life, Miss Primrose suddenly wondered, eating trout. Had she kindled no spark in a single soul? Was there no woman here today who was witty and wise? Thinking thus, she agreed aloud with Hermione Curtis that her daughter should certainly profit by reading modern languages at the university and thought that perhaps she might grow out of dressing in garments fit for only rummage sales.

It was the daughters of these women who were the active ones, able to progress along paths hewn by the generations preceding them. And these were good women. Miss Primrose looked at their plump faces, all smiling benignly. "Do you remember?" they were asking one another, and talking of daring pranks like dormitory feasts and moonlight swims in the school pool. They were having a lovely time. Some might even meet again after today. It was impossible to imagine any of them in a gym slip and shirt.

One was different: Naomi Kent. For one thing, she had never married. But there had been some trouble. Miss Primrose fished the facts from her mind.

Yes—she'd had a baby, a daughter. In the war. So the girl must be well grown by now, probably married and a mother herself.

"Tell me, Naomi—what are you doing now, my dear?" Miss Primrose boomed in the voice which had announced the school hymn, "Fight the Good Fight" at the start and end of each term.

"I run a bookshop, Miss Primrose," Naomi replied. Though over fifty, she was still slim and dark-haired.

"It's dyed," Mildred had whispered. "It's not, you know," Daphne had answered, scrutinizing the smooth jet strands.

"How interesting," Miss Primrose said. "Are you holding up in these difficult days?"

"Oh yes," Naomi said, though increasing costs and falling sales were a serious problem. She looked round at the well nourished women. Had any of them suffered as she had, felt joy and pain like hers? They all looked so smug, with their prosperous husbands or, in the case of the widows, their adequate pensions. She had never had any security. Even now, though Robert and she were together again after so many years apart, what if he died? There would be no pension for her. "Jemima—my daughter—is married now and she has a son," she said. Robert had always helped to pay for Jemima, but the girl didn't know her father's name.

"How nice," said Miss Primrose, and the other ladies rustled in

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their seats. Fancy admitting to it! They'd heard rumors, of course, but hadn't really believed—

Daphne wouldn't have invited Naomi if she had known.

"Jemima?" she asked, frowning.

"My daughter," said Naomi, and longed to add, "and your husband's." Aloud, she went on, "Oh, I'm not married. It was thought a scandal when it happened, but nowadays no one turns away from an unmarried mother. Most of us have probably at one time or another mentally prepared ourselves in case it should happen to a daughter." And these women *would* try to be understanding and tolerant if their daughters became involved with married men, she thought wryly.

Suddenly Miss Primrose recalled something that had bothered her. She had recognized Naomi before any of the other women, but it was not because she had changed less than the others. She had changed a great deal—as a schoolgirl she had been quiet and shy, very unsure of herself, thin and plain. Now she had assurance, was slim but rounded, and she looked alive—she was the most alert-looking woman present. But more: Miss Primrose had seen her a few weeks before in a picture gallery with a grey-haired man who looked rather distinguished. They had not been paying much heed to the pictures, so rapt were they with each other, and this was what had struck Miss Primrose as unusual about them. It was rare to see a couple their age so mutually engrossed. She had assumed them to be husband and wife, but it seemed she was wrong.

Over coffee, the photographs came out, and Miss Primrose admired families. Then her gaze was held fast. In one snapshot, smiling a little self-consciously, she recognized the man who had been with Naomi in the picture gallery.

"My husband Robert," Daphne was saying with pride. "He's a barrister—he gets some very big cases. He'll soon be a judge, I hope."

After lunch they walked by the river bank. It was hot. Insects buzzed about, and the noise of the weir made background distraction. Miss Primrose attempted to talk to the women she had been seated away from during lunch. Each treated her with the old deference—habit died hard.

"Tell me about Naomi," Miss Primrose instructed. "About her daughter—so unfortunate—" Mildred might know the story.

"Oh, she was silly—got herself involved with a married man in

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some wartime escapade," Mildred said. "I heard about it from Betty Butts—she died, you remember. She was a friend of Naomi's."

There was a small silence out of respect for the deceased Betty Butts. Miss Primrose felt sad that some of her girls should not have survived their headmistress.

"He'd married some addlepate during the war, Betty said—the man Naomi got mixed up with. Very pretty but no brains. And he had to stick to her or she'd collapse. He became quite well known later on, I believe, though I don't know who he was. Betty seemed to think his empty marriage drove him on to success—he worked hard because his wife was dull and his home life uninteresting." Mildred paused in her recital. "Some women are very stupid," she declared.

"Had he legitimate children?" Miss Primrose inquired.

"Oh, yes, I believe so," said Mildred. "I'd forgotten about it until now—Daphne didn't mention that Naomi was coming. She can't have known anything about it—she seems a bit shocked. But then, she always was rather a prig."

She may be, and you're complaisant, thought Miss Primrose, filled with dismay.

"I must talk to Naomi," she said, and the ranks of her girls eddied and flowed to allow this to happen.

"My dear Naomi, you look much younger than all your contemporaries," Miss Primrose informed her wayward pupil.

Naomi laughed.

"Perhaps I'm the only one of us who isn't playing a role," she said. "The others all seem to be performing the roles they think are expected of their husbands' wives."

"That's all most of them are capable of," said Miss Primrose. "Though they are valuable citizens, I've no doubt. Good to their neighbors and excellent cooks. Homemade jam and full freezers. You've had a hard time, Naomi."

"In some ways. But I've put that all behind me long ago. Jemima is married—she's happy. I've had a lot of happiness too. And I can retreat into my solitude now when I close up the shop. As *you* can, Miss Primrose. You always could, couldn't you? Being head must have been lonely—it is at the top of any concern. But that's a compensation, isn't it—enjoying solitude?"

"That's true, my dear."

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"And are you enjoying today? Seeing your girls, if you still think of us like that? Do we disappoint you?"

"I wish I could have seen some of the others—those who were too busy to come today. There were *some* with brains," Miss Primrose said wistfully. "You have brains, Naomi. You always had, though perhaps your school career was undistinguished."

"It was," said Naomi. "And I don't know about the brains. Perhaps. At least by using one's mind one can fight against grief."

"I hope we meet again after today, Naomi," said Miss Primrose. "You are one of St. Wilhelmina's better specimens."

Naomi laughed. "The others might not agree," she said. "They probably think I was a disgrace to you and the school."

Dimly Miss Primrose remembered that first war. Dick had been killed on the Somme. She thought of his serious young face as he asked her to marry him on his next leave. They had told no one their plans, and there had been no next leave. She had gone up to Girton. After all this time she had almost forgotten, but not quite. Naomi, at least, had borne a child to her lover.

Miss Primrose thought about Robert Blythe. It was a good name for a judge. If he was so indiscreet as to meet Naomi where he might be recognized and fail to mask his emotions, he might never grace the bench.

"Daphne's children. Do you know what they're like?" Miss Primrose asked slyly. "What do they do?"

"The boy's a solicitor. The daughter's a Cordon Bleu cook. They're both married," she said, and turned her brown eyes upon the faded but very alert blue ones of Miss Primrose.

"Do *they* have children? Grandchildren for Daphne?" Miss Primrose pursued.

"Not yet. Expected, however," said Naomi. And then, a little maliciously, she added, "They live some way away. They fear interference."

"I see." Miss Primrose nodded. "Thank you, my dear. Good luck with your shop."

Naomi, dismissed, drifted away and found herself next to Mildred.

"Funny old thing, Primmy, isn't she?" Mildred said. "I think she's enjoying her day. She's still spot on, though."

"Yes, she is," said Naomi. "Remarkable. But so many old ladies like her are, don't you find? Riding bicycles and mowing their lawns. Tough."

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"I wonder if we'll be as tough if *we* live so long," mused Mildred, rather surprisingly.

"Only the tough or the cossetted survive to a great age," said Naomi.

Miss Primrose was ahead of them, walking with Daphne. The sun beat down on their heads as they drew near to the weir, the white one with the velvet snood and the grey one, old-fashioned lacquered set immovable, broad shoulders bent slightly to the small old lady beside her.

No one saw how it happened. One minute the two were walking along the bank above the weir conversing, the next there was some sort of scuffle as Miss Primrose appeared to stumble. A cry rang out, then a real scream.

Daphne was gone, swept into the river and instantly over the weir. By the time the others had rushed forward to look for life belts she had vanished.

It was Naomi who ran along the bank and found a boat which she paddled right up to the foot of the weir. But Daphne had disappeared.

Miss Primrose, apparently suffering from heat stroke, was taken to the hospital where she spent the night. She recovered swiftly, and at the inquest on Daphne, whose body was washed up further down the river, she said she had fainted. Daphne must have tried to prevent her from falling and in so doing had lost her own footing and slipped into the river, which was notoriously dangerous there, above the weir.

A verdict of accidental death was recorded.

Six months later, Miss Primrose read in the *Times* that His Honour Judge Robert Blythe had married Miss Naomi Kent, quietly at Caxton Hall.

"One of my more deserving pupils, Naomi," Miss Primrose recalled. "And never a prig."

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a *NEW* Uncle George Crowder story by

HUGH PENTECOST

The Hanson mess had been the talk of the town for the last few days. Victor Hanson's estate had been ransacked by what the police suspected was a gang of kids. Hanson had obviously called in private help and Uncle George's nephew Joey had been caught snooping at the scene. His arrest was leading to some shocking and sad discoveries. As Red Egan, Lakeview's sheriff, said, "Somebody kicks over a trash barrel, you notice what's lying around . . ."

A BAD INFLUENCE

by ***HUGH PENTECOST***

It was a rare thing for George Crowder to have visitors after dark. His log cabin, where he lived alone with his dog Timmy, was on the outskirts of the town of Lakeview, approachable only by a rough logging road. If you didn't know it well you didn't try to traverse it after dark in a car. And you didn't try making the long uphill climb on foot unless your reasons were urgent.

George Crowder, on this particular summer night, was sitting in the darkness on the deck outside his cabin, listening to the night sounds in the surrounding woods. Timmy, the setter, lying contentedly by his feet suddenly stiffened and growled. Someone was coming up the road. Crowder leaned forward and saw the blink of an approaching flashlight. The dog let out a sharp bark of warning.

A woman's voice came from down the trail. "Timmy—it's me, Timmy."

A wild thumping of the dog's tail on the deck indicated that he knew almost before his master who the visitor was. "Go show her

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the way, boy," George Crowder said, and Timmy dashed away down the trail.

George went inside the cabin and switched on the inside lights, plus a couple of floods that illuminated the area around the cabin. His sister Esther, who was married to Hector Trimble, the local druggist, was not making a social call at eleven o'clock at night. Only some kind of trouble could be bringing her here. He stepped back out onto the deck. "You okay, Es?" he called out.

Esther came into the circle of light, Timmy bouncing along beside her. She was a handsome woman in her early forties, summer-tanned, her dark hair hanging loosely to her shoulders.

"It's Joey—" she called out to her brother.

George felt his muscles tighten. Joey was Esther's twelve-year-old son. Joey's idol—his role model among men—was his Uncle George. Listen to Joey and Uncle George was the best fisherman, the best hunter, the best man with a dog in the whole world—the wisest and wittiest and most wonderful of men. He talked so much about his Uncle George that the whole town had taken to calling this most wonderful of men Uncle George.

"Is he hurt?" Uncle George asked.

Esther had reached the deck, breathing a little hard from her climb up the trail. "He's been arrested," she said.

"You're kidding!"

"No. He's being held as a youthful offender. Grand larceny, vandalism, and malicious mischief."

Uncle George couldn't believe it. "You and I know he's not guilty of any of those things!"

"How do you know, George?"

"I just know," Uncle George said. "And so should you."

"It's the Hanson mess," Esther told him. "Victor Hanson has a private detective working for him, posing as a gardener. He caught Joey snooping around Hanson's house and grabbed him. Hanson called the State Police and brought charges against Joey."

The Hanson mess had been the talk of the town for the last few days. Victor Hanson was the richest man in Lakeview. He'd bought the old Martin estate some years ago and spent a fortune rebuilding and refurbishing the grounds and garden. He'd contributed generously to local charities, particularly the hospital. He was known around the world as a patron of the arts and a collector of masterpiece paintings. He provided generous help to young people interested in the arts all across the state. He kept a part of his multimillion-dollar

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collection of paintings in his house at Lakeview. "There's no point in collecting beautiful things if you have to keep them locked up in a bank vault," he'd told a reporter for the local weekly newspaper who questioned the wisdom of having a fortune in paintings in an unprotected setting.

Three nights ago the Hanson house had been invaded by what the police suspected was a gang of kids. A painting of no particular value by a local artist Hanson had been helping had been stolen, and a large black mustache had been painted on a Matisse valued at half a million dollars.

Hanson was properly enraged. The State Police and the local sheriff, Red Egan, had been working around the clock to find the kids responsible. Hanson had obviously called in private help, and Joey had been caught at the scene. "What does Joey say?" Uncle George asked.

Esther looked at her brother steadily. "You and Joey have been reading Sherlock Holmes," she said. "Joey was being a detective." Her smile was tight-lipped. "Hector says he always knew your reading and playing games with Joey would get him into trouble."

"Oh, brother!" Uncle George said.

Hector Trimble was not an Uncle George fan. It would not be uncharitable to say that Hector had no fan club of his own. He was a prissy little man who was said to wash his hands twenty or thirty times a day. He wouldn't allow his son Joey to have a pet on the excuse that animal hairs might get into the prescriptions he was making up for his customers. He was humorless, what Uncle George called "a black-and-white man." There was no middle ground for Hector. Things were either right or wrong. His life was lived by irrevocable time schedules—up at a certain time, meals at a certain time, store hours at a certain time, bed at a certain time. He felt that Uncle George was a bad influence on Joey, with useless time spent on hunting, fishing, training that "damn fool dog," and interesting Joey in worthless reading. But there were two good marks on the public assessment of Hector. He had somehow managed to woo and win the handsome and charming Esther Crowder, and he had fathered a "damned nice kid." Of course, Uncle George had had a hand in making the boy what he was—or had until tonight.

"Where's Joey now?" Uncle George asked.

"The town lock-up," Esther said.

"Surely they'll release him in your custody?"

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"Not tonight. Victor Hanson is throwing his weight around. There'll be a hearing in the morning."

"And Hector?"

"He went to Dave Winship," Esther said. Winship was Hector's lawyer. "Dave says we'll just have to wait till morning. I've decided I'd like to have my own lawyer, George."

It just happened that the best lawyer in Lakeview was not practicing law any more. George Crowder. George Crowder, State's Attorney, headed, everyone said, for the Governor's Mansion or the United States Senate, had convicted a man of murder and seen him go to the gas chamber. Some months later new evidence made it clear that the man had been innocent, the victim of a grave miscarriage of justice. George Crowder resigned his public job, closed his local office, and disappeared from town. No one blamed him. As the state's prosecutor he had acted on evidence supplied by the police. "George felt he should have sensed the truth, regardless of the evidence," Esther Trimble told her friends. It was rumored he'd taken off on a history-making binge somewhere. One day five years later he reappeared in Lakeview, his dark hair salted with grey, the lines in his handsome face etched deeper than when he'd gone away. He bought a hunting lodge some rich summer resident had built in the woods and settled there to live alone with Timmy and make his contribution to the growing-up process of his hero-worshipping and much beloved nephew.

"Joey deserves the best legal defense he can get," Esther said.

Uncle George hesitated a moment and then put his hand on his sister's shoulder. "Maybe what he needs is the best detective he can get. Come on, Es, I'll drive you home."

Red Egan, Lakeview's sheriff, was an old friend and crony of Uncle George. They had grown up together in the small town. At this stage of their lives the two men shared their free time fishing and hunting and talking about what interested them most, in particular the unpredictable insanities of people.

Uncle George found his lanky carrot-topped friend in his office at the Town Hall, even though it was eleven-thirty at night. Red Egan swung his booted feet down off his desk and grinned at his friend. "Been waiting for you, George," he said.

"Oh?"

"I knew when you heard about Joey you'd be on your bicycle."

"I'd like to see him, Red."

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The sheriff knocked the tobacco out of his charred black pipe in a metal ashtray on his desk. "Afraid I can't manage that, even for you, George. He's been charged, allowed to see his lawyer, and can't receive any visitors until after the hearing in the morning."

"He's only twelve years old, for God's sake!" Uncle George said.

Red Egan nodded. "But Victor Hanson's on the warpath," he said. "Maybe half a million dollars' worth of damage done at his place, a painting stolen. He's convinced it was kids, and when Joey was caught prowling around he decided they were back for more. He had Joey arrested, brought charges, and we have to go by the book."

"Have you talked to Joey?"

"Yes." Red Egan smiled. "He says he was playing detective. He says he doesn't believe that kids, his friends in the town, could be guilty. He was after the truth, he says."

"And you don't believe him?"

"On the contrary, I do believe him. But Hanson doesn't, and the State Police don't, and the county prosecutor doesn't."

"I'm his lawyer," Uncle George said.

"Hector hired Dave Winship to represent him—he said he knew you'd try to get into the act and we have strict instructions to keep you away from Joey. Hector says you've turned the boy into the irresponsible kid he is."

"Stupid jerk!"

"In spades," Red Egan agreed. "Relax, George—it'll get straightened away after the hearing in the morning. It's set for ten o'clock at the County Courthouse."

"He's not going to spend the night in jail!" Uncle George said.

"You'll have to set fire to the joint to get him out, George."

"Maybe not," Uncle George said. "Why are they so convinced kids robbed Hanson and damaged his property?"

Red Egan shrugged. "The painting that was stolen didn't have any real value. It was a nude painting of a lady, done by Barry Sheldon—young fellow lives up on Mountain Road. He's one of the young artists Hanson was helping out. Hanson bought the painting from him for a couple of hundred bucks when Sheldon needed money. As I understand it, the painting was just a sort of exercise Sheldon did, sketching a nude model. There are a couple of dozen paintings in the house worth a fortune that a professional thief could have taken. Painting a mustache on a half-million-dollar painting by some French painter looks like more kid stuff. A naked lady would

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attract kids. A professional thief would have gone for the valuable stuff."

"If Joey says he was playing detective, he was."

"I know."

"I'm going to talk to Hanson if I have to drag him out of bed," Uncle George said. He turned for the door.

"Interesting thing about the painting that was stolen," Red Egan said. "The model was a professional girl who posed for students at some art school in New York. She came up here to spend a weekend with Barry Sheldon, whom I guess she knew from the school. That was about a year ago. Sheldon did the painting of her while she was here. She was here for just a weekend and then went back to the city. About a week ago this girl committed suicide—cut her wrists and let herself bleed to death in a hot tub. It was in some of the papers."

"Could there be a connection?"

"The cops asked Sheldon about it. He told them he knew it had happened, said he'd been shocked when he heard about it—she was a nice girl, but he hadn't seen her since the weekend she was here a year ago and he had no way of knowing what had driven her to suicide."

"Bothers you though, Red?"

Red Egan shrugged. "Somebody kicks over a trash barrel, you notice what's lying around," he said.

It was almost midnight when Uncle George drove up the bluestone driveway to Victor Hanson's lovely old Colonial house. Most of Lakeview appeared to be asleep as Uncle George had driven along the main street, but Hanson's home was brightly lighted, both inside and out. A number of parked cars indicated some kind of party was in progress. A variety of license plates suggested an invasion by the media. Victor Hanson and his famous art collection was news to people far beyond the town limits of Lakeview.

A black man wearing a white house jacket answered Uncle George's knock on the front door. The two men weren't strangers to each other. In the days when Uncle George had first started to practice law in Lakeview, Charles Wilson had come to him for help in some minor legal matter and Uncle George had helped him solve his problem.

"Mr. Hanson's been expecting you, Mr. Crowder," Wilson said. "I'll tell him you're here."

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"Expecting me?"

"They told him you'd be likely to try to help out your nephew. I guess you should know he's pretty convinced. I'm afraid you won't get very far with him, but he'll talk long enough to speak his piece."

Victor Hanson was a familiar figure in the town of Lakeview—tall, dark, handsome, elegantly dressed for any occasion. Women, Uncle George imagined, found him dangerously appetizing. Men were inclined to think him arrogant and opinionated. "If you aren't that good-looking and that rich, you're liable to resent him," Red Egan once said.

Hanson abandoned his press conference to join Uncle George in the wide entrance hall. He had a deep, almost musical voice, but it was angry now. "I've been expecting you, Crowder," he said. "Before you say anything, let me tell you I will not withdraw my charges against the boy."

"He was trying to help his friends—and you," Uncle George said. "He was trying to find the truth about what happened here."

"A twelve-year-old boy? He's lying, of course."

"Joey isn't a liar," Uncle George said.

"All kids lie when they're in trouble."

"Not this boy."

"Naturally you're prejudiced," Hanson said. "Well, I'm prejudiced too—against today's kids, who take pleasure in the senseless destruction of other people's property. I can understand, maybe even sympathize with, people who steal for money. But senseless destruction? That deserves punishment—and I'm not letting your nephew off on some cock-and-bull story."

"How bad is the damage?" Uncle George asked.

Hanson gave a short mirthless laugh. "Are you thinking of buying him off, Crowder? There's a Matisse, maybe destroyed, worth at least half a million dollars. If it can be saved, it's going to cost me an arm and a leg. I've already talked to an expert in Paris who has restored old masters. He's on his way from Europe and that alone will cost thousands of dollars—God knows what his fee will be."

"I heard there was also a painting stolen," Uncle George said.

"Not of any value," Hanson said, sounding impatient. "An art student's effort, a boy I've been trying to help get a career started."

"Barry Sheldon?"

"Yes. You know him?"

"I've seen him working at landscapes out on the countryside. We've chatted. The boy has big dreams."

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"He's talented or I wouldn't be wasting time with him," Hanson said. "He needed money a while back. Rather than make him a loan he'd feel obligated to pay back, or offer him charity, I bought a painting from him for a couple of hundred dollars. It was a painting of a nude model who'd posed at an art school Barry went to in New York for a while."

"Did you know the model?"

"No."

"I thought you might have bought that particular painting because you did know her," Uncle George said. "I understand from Red Egan that she committed suicide a week or ten days ago."

"So I was told. Tragic in a young person." Hanson frowned. "When I said I didn't know the girl that wasn't quite accurate. She spent a weekend at Barry's cottage about a year ago. I believe that's when he painted her. I happened to drop by one morning while she was posing and was introduced. All in all, five minutes. I didn't *know* her, but I met her that once." Hanson changed the subject abruptly. "Come with me. I'll show you what those little monsters did to my Matisse."

The Matisse, handsomely framed, was hung over the mantel in what appeared to be a study—book-lined, a beautiful old rolltop desk, shelves and shelves of books. It was a painting of a woman in a pale-pink dress, sitting in a garden, surrounded by flowers. What must have been a lovely face had been marred by a grotesque mustache painted on her upper lip. It was a Salvador Dali kind of mustache, curled wildly up at each end so that it spread over her cheeks.

"God knows what it will take to remove that monstrosity without damaging the original," Hanson said.

Uncle George moved close to the painting, studying it. "That's no kid's scrawl," he said. "It's very skillfully painted on. Was the painting that was stolen kept in this room too?"

Hanson laughed. "Lord, no! It wasn't good enough to be kept in the same county with this Matisse. There's a storage room just down the hall where I keep paintings I don't choose to hang."

Uncle George turned away. "You're determined to keep a twelve-year-old boy in jail overnight?"

"You're damned right I'm determined," Hanson said. "It will teach the little creep a lesson."

"I may be back," Uncle George said, and left.

The place where Barry Sheldon lived and worked on Mountain

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Road had once been a carriage house on one of the big estates. It consisted of one big room with a bath built into one corner of it, a counter-kitchenette in another, with a skylight that had been cut into the roof by Barry himself.

It was well after midnight when Uncle George knocked on the door. There were no lights visible in the windows. After several knocks a sleepy voice asked who was there.

"It's George Crowder, Barry."

"Hold on a minute, Mr. Crowder."

Lights appeared at the windows and presently the door was opened. Barry Sheldon, his blond hair ruffled, was tightening the belt on a pair of jeans.

"Sorry," he said. "Come in, Mr. Crowder."

"It's not a proper time for a social call, Barry," Uncle George apologized, "but this isn't exactly social. You've heard Victor Hanson's brought charges against my nephew, Joey, for stealing your painting from him and messing up a valuable Matisse?"

The young artist's face darkened. "I heard. Hanson must be off his rocker. Joey wouldn't do anything like that."

"He's properly upset," Uncle George said. "He's importing an expert from France to see if the Matisse can be salvaged. It will probably cost him a small fortune."

Sheldon's smile was bitter. "I hope it costs him plenty just to find out that mustache was drawn on with water-soluble paint that can be wiped off with a sponge without harming the original."

"That doesn't sound friendly to a man who's been so helpful to you, Barry."

"In my world you take help where you can get it," Sheldon said.

"You've spent some time in and out of his house."

"Lived there for a while before I found this place," Sheldon acknowledged.

"Do you know where the storage room is where he keeps paintings he doesn't choose to hang?"

"Sure—I helped him catalogue what's in there."

Uncle George looked around the room, at the easel and paintbox where Sheldon worked, at the stack of canvasses in a far corner, at the rumpled bed.

"It wouldn't take me long to make some coffee," Sheldon said.

"Thanks, but I haven't got time, Barry," Uncle George said. "I want to get Joey home to his own bed as soon as I can."

"You've persuaded Hanson to withdraw charges against Joey?"

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"No, but I will. The painting of yours that was stolen—I under-tand the girl you used as a model committed suicide a few days go."

Sheldon's face darkened. "Belinda Marshall. Sweet kid. It shouldn't ave happened to her."

"The painting over there with your others?" Uncle George asked, is tone casual.

"What are you talking about?"

"Mind if I look?" Uncle George asked. He started toward the stack f canvasses.

Barry Sheldon blocked his way. Uncle George smiled at him. Barry, I can take you apart with one arm tied behind me," he said. I suggest you bring out the painting. It has to be you, you know. 'ou know how to get into Hanson's house without being detected. 'ou know where the unhung paintings are stored. You know that ıustache was painted on the Matisse with water-soluble paint. You on't like Hanson, in spite of what he's done for you, so I suspect ou wanted to get even with him for something. Was it that girl, ielinda?"

"It was as good as murder, although the law won't see it that ray," Sheldon said, turning away.

"Want to tell me?" Uncle George asked.

"*Yes,* it was Belinda," Sheldon said bitterly. He turned back and Jncle George saw tears in his eyes. "She was a sweet girl—dumb, ut very sweet. Hanson came here that day I was painting her. She ras posing for me, nude. I'd drawn her and painted her dozens of imes in art school—in life class. She was a professional model. It idn't bother her when a stranger walked in here. She wouldn't reak her pose until I suggested it. So Hanson just stood in that oorway—" Sheldon pointed. "He stood there, staring at Belinda, ike a hungry man looking in a bakery-store window. He excused imself for barging in. He said he was on his way into town and hought I might need something. And he invited Belinda and me or drinks and a picnic supper at his place that night. That's when t started."

"Belinda and Hanson?"

Sheldon nodded. He said, "Hanson made with charm that evening, guess. He arranged to see Belinda in New York. I had this place hen, had given up going to art school. Money was tight and I went o Hanson to ask for a loan. He went through some high-toned moral ıogwash about not wanting me to feel obligated by a debt, not want-

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ing me to have to ask for charity. He'd buy a painting for a coupl of hundred bucks. 'Someday when you get famous I might make a big profit on it,' he said. He looked over my paintings and chose th life study I'd done of Belinda. Would you believe it never occurre to me he'd chosen it for any other reason than that he thought I'd done it well?"

"I believe it," Uncle George said.

"I sat up here painting the mountains, and bowls of fruit or what ever when it rained, and Hanson, it turned out, had set Belinda up in an apartment in New York and was buying her clothes and pre sents."

"And you were jealous when you found out?"

"Hell, no! I didn't have any romantic notions about Belinda. She was a nice kid who'd been part of the art-school world I'd been living in. She was a good model and I enjoyed painting her. But in the end almost a year after the first time Hanson saw her here, she asked me for help. That's when I heard about the apartment, the gifts, and that she'd been Hanson's mistress for all that time. To him she'd been a sex object; to her he'd been a Prince Charming. She was in love with him and suddenly he'd told her to drop dead. He'd spotted someone he wanted more. She pleaded with me to go to him and ask him to give her another chance."

"And you went?"

Sheldon nodded. "He just laughed at me. 'When you've had enough you've had enough,' he told me. 'There were no promises, no commitments,' he told me. A couple of days later she was dead. She couldn't take it."

"So?"

"There was no way to get at him through the law," Sheldon said. "He hadn't committed any legal crime. I'm not a macho type. Beating him up wasn't my kind of thing. But I was damned if I was going to let him keep that picture around. So I went and took it. I knew how to get in and out. On the way out I saw the Matisse. I happened to have a marker tube in my pocket and I painted that mustache on it. I hoped it would jolt him a little."

"Would you show me the painting you did of Belinda?" Uncle George asked.

Sheldon crossed the room and brought back a framed painting. Uncle George looked at it for a moment.

"That's damn good, Barry," he said. "It may be worth a hell of a lot more than Hanson paid for it someday."

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"So what's the next move?" Sheldon asked, in a dead-sounding voice.

"We go to Hanson, tell him what we know, and get my nephew released."

"And I go to jail," Sheldon said.

"I'd guess the odds are against that," Uncle George said.

Victor Hanson, his face dark with anger, listened to Barry Sheldon's confession.

"You ungrateful bastard!" he said to Barry.

"Barry tells me the Matisse can be restored with a little soap and water," Uncle George said.

"I notice he hasn't brought back my painting," Hanson said. He turned toward the telephone on the table by the door. "Well, now it's a matter for the police and the county attorney."

"Hold it just a minute," Uncle George said. "It seems to me you have two options, Hanson. They both begin with the same action. You call Red Egan in the sheriff's office, tell him you're dropping charges against my nephew and that I'll be over at the county lock-up in fifteen minutes to take him home."

"Of course, since we have the real criminal," Hanson said.

"Now come your choices," Uncle George told him. "You can drop all charges against Sheldon. After all, your Matisse is undamaged," he pointed out.

"Absurd," Hanson said. "You think I'd let a miserable thief and vandal go free?"

"So your second choice is to bring charges against Barry," Uncle George said. "In which case I'll act as his lawyer. I'll defend him the best way I can, which will be, first, to reveal your relationship with Belinda Marshall, which, in the end, drove her to suicide. Second, I'll have to expose the fact that you bought a painting from my client, under the guise of being a friend, for ten times less what it's actually worth. Since you're an expert you had to know what its real worth was."

"That's blackmail!" Hanson protested.

Uncle George smiled at him.

"I suppose you could call it that," he said. "I'd have to say that your ethics and mine are a little different. Now call Red Egan and tell him I'm on my way."

"Thanks, Mr. Crowder." Barry Sheldon's voice was unsteady.

"My pleasure," Uncle George said.

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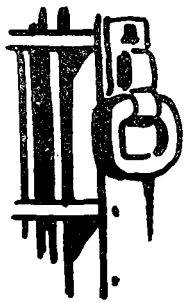
It was a few minutes before one in the morning when Red Egan brought a smiling Joey Trimble into his office from the jail cell where the boy had been held. Joey's eyes lit up at the sight of his uncle. "I knew you'd get me out, Uncle George!" he said. "I told the lawyer Dad sent that if he'd just see you—"

"I have a piece of advice for you, boy," Uncle George interrupted. "From now on, let me be Sherlock Holmes and you be Dr. Watson. That way you'll probably get into a lot less trouble."

"Amen," Red Egan said.



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a ***NEW*** short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

Terry Teague was a big man, but not impressive—too flabby, too nervous when voices were raised or fists clenched to make a credible frightener. However, if you were old, frail, alone, and probably short-sighted into the bargain, Teague was impressive enough to plunder an easy living.

A beautifully compact new crime story from Jeffry Scott, in which every connection, every character counts. Writers, take note. Readers, take caution . . .

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Marstock wasn't a village. It *had* been until the First World War ended and the idealists' goal of homes fit for heroes shrank into fitful explosions of gimcrack boxes hardly fit for cowards but just sufficient to part ex-soldiers from their money.

Right through the 1920s, Marstock was bludgeoned, throttled, felled, and poisoned, becoming that painful spectacle, a creature dying a slow and disgraceful death.

Terry Teague loved the place, exploring it at least once a year, though never in the same month. At least, he thought it was Marstock or thereabouts. The city having long since swallowed the village, it was a neighborhood of uncertain frontiers.

After parking the van with a bad driver's gusto, he started combing his lank hair. His knuckles grazed the roof of the cab as he straightened the parting. He was a big man, but not impressive—too flabby, too nervous when voices were raised or fists clenched to make a credible frightener.

However, if you were old, frail, alone, and probably short-sighted

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into the bargain, Teague was impressive enough to plunder an easy living.

"How much at that last one, then?" he grunted, knowing to the penny—but young Herb Cherry needed constant reminders of how lucky he was to be working with a successful pro.

Such hints didn't need to be too oblique. Herb Cherry knew a lot about motor bikes, a little of the sort of girls undiscriminating enough not to mind about his acne and lamentable standards of personal hygiene, and pretty well everything there was to know about being worthless. Those fields apart, he would go ignorant to the grave.

"Eighty quid, Tel," Cherry replied, "it was in the teapot."

Teague assumed it had been a hundred pounds. At least Cherry wasn't too greedy. Aloud, he said knowledgably, "Ah, that'd be the old duck's funeral money. They'll starve themselves just to make sure of a good coffin. Crazy lot."

"Where now, Tel?"

Teague squinted through the side window. He had a bad memory for names and a good one for urban landscapes. Corn Street meant nothing to him but he knew he'd never been down this grimy brick trench before.

They took opposite sides of the street, casually alert for their invitation—a front garden with knee-high grass, a broken front gate that a hale person could put right in a jiffy, upper panes of a ground-floor window grimy while the lower half twinkled because the resident couldn't stretch up any more and dared not balance on step-ladder or chair.

"Good spot, Tel!" Cherry shouted across, and Teague winced. It was, of course. A neglected storage area where lower-paid workers put themselves away for the night, menfolk mainly away during the day or trying to sleep ready for night shift. He glared at the kid and shook his head.

A moment later, Herb Cherry was whistling shrilly. Teague joined him. Cherry had been at this game for less than a month now, but like many modestly brained animals he had certain unexpected instincts. To Terry Teague, the veteran, the house looked no more promising than the rest. Still, you had to start somewhere and his system was beginning to whimper for alcohol. Within two hours it would be screaming and raging and he wouldn't be able to work.

The woman who came to the door, after a long wait, reminded him of a horse. Ready for the glue factory, too, he told himself. Long

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face, large teeth, a gaunt broomstick body that might have been coltish in her girlhood, sixty years ago.

"What is it?"

And Teague's heart lifted, because she was faking. Fierce expression, but nothing back of it. Or rather, *something* shaky behind the show. Guilt, fear, or whatever making the milky once-blue eyes roll, so that the horsy air was strong enough to amuse him. Most of the old crocks were batty, in Teague's opinion.

He flashed the card at her—he'd had it run up at an instant-print shop and encased in clear plastic with a glaring red diagonal stripe masking his postage-stamp-sized photograph. That, his thrusting belly, and sober blue three-piece suit generally did the trick.

"Oh, my God," she whispered.

"You're to be Inspected," Teague announced and just kept walking in until she shrank aside. Cherry, whose other great talent was for being soft-footedly unobtrusive, kept at his master's heels.

Three strides into the hall, Teague wrinkled his nose and put on a disgusted look.

"It's only the gas," she said defensively. "There was a little leak last week—it's been attended to."

"Drains," he contradicted loudly, scribbling in a dingy notebook. "Unfit for habitation, I shouldn't wonder, but we'll see. Smith, go and check the upstairs. Special attention to the electrical wiring, mind—looks as if it hasn't been renewed since Hitler was a lad."

"No," she exclaimed, her voice desperate, "you mustn't!" Teague's main emotion was impatience. He'd met hundreds of this woman's kind—reclusive, timid, privacy their greatest treasure, and crippled and warped by their generation's conditioned respect for authority.

"All right, Ma," he boomed, deliberately misunderstanding her, "I'll check upstairs and Mr. Smith can take the details."

He mounted the stairs two at a time, hearing Cherry, who quite enjoyed the ritual now that he'd got it straight at last, shouting, "Name and address, Ma, and your date of birth. Then, how long you've lived here. Got to keep the forms straight, see. No, you come in here with me, we've got to do the form!"

It took Teague five seconds to assess the two bedrooms and only a minute or two more to search them. In the process, he could weigh the old woman's life. Domestic service, he guessed, a lifetime with the same family—sepia-faded photographs in nickel-silver frames beside her bed, with an imposing house in the background and none of the dead faces showing any family likeness to her.

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Some of Terry Teague's kind elaborated on the rackets, with advance men posing as public-health officials and teams of "jobbing builders" calling the same day, offering to put right what the previous partner had criticized. There'd been a story in the papers the other day of a legally blind eighty-year-old paying two-thousand pounds in cash to predators who "fixed the roof," spending an hour up there and breaking more tiles than they replaced.

Teague sucked his teeth. Paradoxically, he was angered by the vulnerability on which he battened. Silly fools!

He couldn't be bothered with all that messing about, and in any case he had no intention of dirtying his hands with even the pretense of work. He and Herb Cherry pilfered what they could pocket and bluffed and bullied money out of victims if the circumstances were right.

But there was nothing here, Teague decided. Either Cherry's nose for pickings had misled them or the stuff was downstairs. —Then he stopped in his tracks.

He'd almost missed the cupboard. The door was papered to match the wall but grimy marks from constant opening and shutting—the handle was tiny, a wood toadstool painted to match the paper—made him spot it.

Teague yanked the door open. It wasn't a closet, after all, but a slice-of-cake section where the roof sloped to meet the wall. You could walk in there a couple of steps before banging your head.

As daylight streamed into the triangular space, his nerves crawled and jangled. He couldn't analyze his reaction, far less put it into words, but for no firm reason he didn't like it at all.

The booze, he thought, sweating. You've got to take it easier—you'll be seeing things next.

As the shock abated, too tenuous for more than a momentary impact, another greater one replaced it.

The only object in the closet was an oil painting, unframed. It was a nude, exuding an aura more violent than erotic: graphic and unsparing, flesh tones of grey and mauve. An onlooker needed to be exceptionally insensitive not to receive at least some of the picture's messages—the body as an object inspiring something of gloating, something of self-disgust in the painter. The woman lay on a hastily indicated bed or couch, hands and feet grotesquely elongated, shame and tension in the very line of her bony hip and meager, pathetically drooping breasts.

It was very powerful, very disturbing.

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It was also manifestly, undeniably, an undiscovered work of Edwin Huckle. "Jesus," Teague mumbled, and his awe was so deep that the blasphemy sounded prayerful.

When pressed, Terry would describe himself as a general dealer or sometimes an antique dealer. Once he'd "gone on the knocker" as scout for genuine antique merchants, and he did have an unfeigned interest and some expertise in art. Huckle, he knew, had died around 1934. Teague wasn't extremely literate, relying on sharp ears and memory, and paintings fascinated him, not their painters. Huckle, he seemed to recall, had been involved in some form of scandal, but that was before Terry was born.

The artist had left a number of paintings, but not enough to satisfy a buoyant market. Over the past decade, Huckle's stock had risen. An American museum had generated modest headlines with a record price at auction for his *Pierrot Skeleton* and Teague had heard talk of a London forger considering a fling at Edwin Huckle.

Teague wanted a drink, urgently. He was looking at an item measuring no more than a large tea tray that after verification—and he knew in his bones it must be confirmed as genuine—would fetch at least 25,000 pounds.

His brain raced, covering angles. Would the old party kick up a fuss? No, any more than she would agree to sell, even for a decent sum. For Teague, staring hungrily, had just made another discovery.

The old party was the painting's subject.

Dimly aware of a growing disturbance downstairs, Teague nodded, chewing his lower lip. That was it. When she'd been a twenty-year old, and a servant at that, the painting must have struck her as being as near obscene or pornographic as made no odds. No matter what her status, it was outrageous.

So she had hidden it away here ever since. By the same token, even today, when the most explicit nudity was a commercial product, taken for granted, and any painting by Edwin Huckle automatically an object of respect, Teague sensed she'd never go to the police.

He was reaching for the canvas when he heard a savage scream, a shout of alarm, and the brutal clamor of shattered glass. Panic jolted him like an electric shock. Slamming the closet door, he lumbered out of the bedroom and clattered downstairs.

At first glance, it was impossible to tell whether Herb Cherry or the old lady was the person at bay.

Cherry, sweatily ashen, stood beside a desk bureau, its flap down,

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with his chair lying behind him. Evidently he'd been writing at the bureau, his chair drawn out to block the door, while going through the ludicrous, distracting litany of Taking Your Details.

The old woman, gasping and panting, stood beside the window. Its yellowing muslin curtain was restlessly alive, the pane shattered and a smell of smoke and rain blowing in.

"She's bloody crazy, Tel! Heaved an ornament-thing through the window!"

"Yes! Yes!" Her voice wasn't rational. "You've no right in here, poking about! No right!"

Teague was about to bluster when she snatched up a brass bell from the windowsill and, half turning, drew her arm back. "I'll break another window! I will! The police station's over there, they'll hear me. Help!"

Staring past the poised bell, Teague saw a Victorian building in the next street, grimy blue lamp jutting out, police cars parked outside. He had half a mind to pelt back for the painting. A gambler's hunch whispered that she was bluffing, that the window-breaking was hysterical and she'd be as dismayed as himself if the police arrived.

She had her shameful secret, and the old guard's reluctance to be involved with blue uniforms. Respectable people—and she was that, all right—just didn't have the police round.

Cherry was dancing with agitation. "Leave it, Tel! Come *on*." He fled. When the woman made to hurl another missile at the glass, that was too much for Teague. He raced Herb Cherry to the van.

Later, with a second Scotch inside, he congratulated himself on a narrow escape. Not from the house, but from avoidable hazards. He'd never taken a painting before and so Cherry would have noticed it and probably mentioned the fact to his equally crooked family, who weren't fools and might make trouble, demanding a cut.

Cherry finished his lager and lime. "What a day, eh? Should of stood in bed. Forty lousy quid each."

"It'll be better tomorrow. And next time, don't go hollering my right name all over the place when things get a bit sticky. 'Tel' this and 'Tel' that—you might as well leave 'em my card."

"Get stuffed. I've got more guts than you anyday." Herb Cherry, liking reproofs even less than he liked soap and water, slouched out of the pub.

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Once round the corner, Cherry's open resentment turned to merriment. He thought he'd been very cunning, flaring up like that and getting away up on his toes before the guv'ner asked if he'd nicked anything from downstairs at the mad woman's house. And by tomorrow, after a night's boozing, Teague would have forgotten the matter.

Abstracted, her worry and concern concentrated on the sound of Teague's heavy tread upstairs, the woman had opened the desk for him to write on. He'd glimpsed a fat envelope among some old postcards in one of the vertical pigeonholes.

"That side window's against planning regulations, Ma."

Her head had went round to it—"It's always been there, it's part of the house"—and the envelope was in Cherry's inside pocket.

Cherry looked back at the pub, loped across the street, and entered a park. He hadn't dared open the thing yet. It was sealed with red wax, several blobs along the flap, which was suggestive and promising.

He ripped the envelope apart.

Newspaper clippings! Nothing but yellow, brittle strips of dull print! Not money! He tossed the stuff down, earning a frown from an old gentleman on a bench, and went off to another pub.

Waiting until nightfall, Terry Teague didn't risk knocking when he returned. He sneaked round to the back door and kicked it open.

The old woman, alarmed by the sound, ran to the hall and barred the stairway. "Don't bother to throw anything through a window, Ma," he jeered. "I shan't be long. Get out of the way or you'll be hurt."

The fight went out of her. "I knew you weren't the Council. You're a policeman—after all these years."

Teague's eyelids flickered. "Yeah, that's it. I'm the law. One side, *if* you please."

Her arms dropped to her sides. "I should have burnt it long ago. I wanted to this morning, after you came. But I couldn't. It's stronger than me, it's me as I was and him as he was. I hate it and I love it, the way it was with him."

But Teague, confident that she really was off her head, wasn't listening. He sped upstairs.

Once Cherry had stormed out of the park, the old man rose painfully from the bench and gathered up the scraps of papers, grum-

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bling, though covertly glad to be active and useful. He was thrusting the clippings into a trash bin when a name caught his attention. He sat back down again and scanned every one.

The old boy had been a solicitors' clerk, with true-crime—especially unsolved murders—as a busman's-holiday hobby. With a pang of vanity, he told himself he knew as much as the clippings that had jogged his memory. The Edwin Huckle Case: painter, bohemian type, bit of a bad lot, found in his lodgings one night, throat slashed, probably with an old-fashioned straight razor. The police had no suspects, unless the girl could be counted. The landlady's daughter, Louisa Traine. Lu. Huckle had used Lu as a model when she was a little girl, producing the only popular success of his lifetime. *Dolls at Tea with Lu* had been written up in the papers during the summer of '28, the old man recalled, and was seen on calendars and candy packs.

But a few years later Lu had gone into service as nursery maid with a Lord or a Sir who lived in Surrey. After that, she'd gone home only on days off and for brief holidays. If she and Huckle had had an affair, they'd kept it secret—no link between them was ever uncovered.

And Lu had an alibi. Friends saw her going into a cinema the night Edwin Huckle was murdered and the ticket-taker testified that Lu had left the cinema after the second feature finished, when Huckle's blood was still congealing. Naturally, she could have slipped out and back in again—the movie-house was five minutes from her mother's lodging house—but she'd withstood interrogation, and Huckle had been a man with many enemies. The pensioner sighed, chilled by the twilight wind, and cast the clippings into the bin before hurrying away to his tea.

Lu Traine stared up after Teague. Fancy the police keeping on the case after all these years. Dully, she thought that people weren't hanged any more, just put in prison.

Then, as the closet door squeaked open, a sound she knew so well, the implications burst on her. The police would take the picture away, it would be shown to strangers in court, she would lose it and her secret and her self-respect forever!

Keening and wringing her hands, she went to the kitchen. The dresser drawer fell on the floor because she yanked so hard. She found the narrow hardness wrapped in the scrap of threadbare tea-towel she had stowed away at the back.

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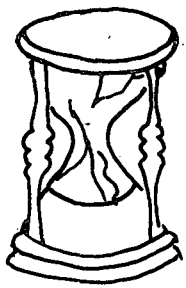
The big policeman would have both hands occupied with the painting. And the light was poor at the foot of the stairs. He must not take the painting away. Nobody must know about it. She would not allow that.

Terry Teague came lumbering down. Lu Traine's breath whistled through her nostrils.

The cut-throat razor, stained as with rust, had not been used for nearly half a century. It kept an edge, however, because it had touched flesh only once before.

Lu Traine gripped it hard, moving aside as if giving Teague room to pass. "No," she said quietly. He never saw the rest.



DETECTIVERSE

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR I.R.S.

by SALLY PALMER

As the deadline draws near,
Would that Sherlock were here
To untangle these taxing instructions.
And, in earning his fee,
What a bonus if he
Could come up with some brilliant deductions!

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a ***NEW*** short story by

CLARK HOWARD

Jorge was one of the best hand-shapers of cigars in the entire factory. He knew the leaf by texture, touch, aroma, and instinct. His wife Luz had once marveled at how much he knew about tobacco when coffee was his first love. Jorge told her that a man learned what he had *to learn to survive, but that he loved only what he* wanted *to love.*

A tense and sensitive story about good and evil by Clark Howard, whose intensely human tales are bringing in more and more letters of well deserved praise . . .

PUERTO RICAN BLUES

by CLARK HOWARD

The first-class cabin of the Eastern flight to San Juan was only half full, so Cesar Navarez and his friend Bannion were able to talk without being overheard by other passengers.

"What makes you think your brother will go along with the deal?" Bannion asked. He was a flat-faced man with cold eyes. No one in his right mind would have started trouble with him.

"I know my brother," Cesar said. "He's a *jibaro*, a Puerto Rican hillbilly. He works in the tobacco factory, rolling cigars for a living. But he's also got this little patch of dirt where he grows coffee beans. It's part of what used to be a plantation that produced some of the best coffee beans in the world. But that was long ago. Anyway, this brother of mine has had a dream all his life of restoring that little patch of land to its former condition and once again growing the best coffee beans in the world. He's a dreamer, my brother. Dreamers

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can be had, my friend, if they think what they do will help their dreams come true. He'll go along with the deal. I guarantee it."

"I hope you're right," Bannion said. Somehow, coming from the flat-faced man, it sounded almost like a threat. But it did not bother Cesar. He was not afraid of Bannion, or of anyone else. His many years in the South Bronx had conditioned him against fear. He was already carrying scars from two knife slashes and one gunshot wound. When his time came, he knew there would be nothing he could do about it. Until then he would survive.

"Another drink, gentlemen?" the cabin attendant asked.

"Why not?" said Cesar. Bannion ordered one also.

"Let me tell you a story about my brother," Cesar said after their fresh drinks arrived. "When we were little kids, when I was about ten and Jorge was twelve, Jorge picked up this stray dog and brought it home. It was just a dirty mongrel but it had stepped on a piece of glass and one of its paws was cut. Jorge asked our old man could he keep the mongrel and take care of it, and the old man said okay. At that time there were seven kids at home and we all lived in a little *bohio*. You know what a *bohio* is? It is a corrugated tin shack set up on a slab of concrete. Most *jibaros* live in them.

"So, anyway, there's nine of us including my parents and we all live in this *bohio*. My old man works for the tobacco plantation for slave wages, you know, and we never have enough of anything—never enough clothes, never enough beds, never enough to eat. But my old man, he's a real chump, you know, a real loser. He tells Jorge, sure, you can keep the mongrel—he even helps him doctor the cut paw so it don't get infected. My old lady, who was a little more practical, says to my father, hey, we don't have enough food to feed no dog. But the old man says there's always scraps, the dog can eat scraps. So Jorge gets to keep the dog."

Cesar took a large swallow of his drink and stared unblinkingly at the seatback in front of him. He was no longer merely telling a story to Bannion—he was reliving it.

"That same week I had asked my old man for a couple of dollars to buy fishing line and bait. I wanted to fish the mountain streams for bass and see if I could sell it at the outdoor market in Jayuca, where we lived. But the old man wouldn't give it to me—he said there were too many people selling fish in the market already and I'd just get stuck with whatever I caught. I got really sore, you know, because Jorge got to keep that lousy mongrel and I didn't get my fishing line. I waited a month so nobody would be suspicious of me,

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and one night when everybody was asleep I put a burlap coffee-bean sack over that dog's head and smothered it."

Cesar paused for a moment, still staring straight ahead. His eyes had narrowed to slits and his face looked like a death mask. Bannion watched him, unmoved by the story—so Cesar killed a dog, so what? Finally Cesar sighed quietly and came out of his fixation. He tossed down the rest of his drink.

"Anyway, Jorge knew how upset I'd been over the fishing line, but even so he never suspected me for a minute. That's the way it is with dreamers—most of the time they live in a world all their own and they won't do nothing that'll let the real world in. It was easier for Jorge to blame somebody he didn't know. He ended up saying his dog was killed by wandering gypsies."

Cesar lighted a cigarette and blew an almost perfect smoke ring. "Jorge will go along with the deal, all right," he said confidently. "I know he will because he's still a dreamer."

While they were waiting for their luggage after the plane landed at San Juan's Isla Verde airport, Cesar went into the barber shop for a shoeshine. He was wearing shoes made of endangered alligator skin, which he had to buy illegally but which he felt gave him status. The rest of his wardrobe was equally expensive—Italian silk suit, custom-made shirt, designer tie with a diamond stickpin.

While Cesar got his shoeshine, Bannion stood near the baggage conveyor waiting for their luggage. Looking around the airport, he noticed that a large number of locals seemed to be dressed in blue. Not just blue, but almost the same shade of blue, with very little variation. Almost as if it were a uniform. Bannion thought it odd but didn't have time to dwell on it because the bags began arriving.

They rented a Cadillac at the Avis counter and Cesar drove the eight kilometers into the city. As soon as they got into the metropolitan area, Bannion began seeing people dressed in identical blue again. He also noticed storefronts, doors, even entire homes painted in the same shade.

"What's with the blue?" he asked.

"That's the color of the statehood movement," Cesar explained. "People who want Puerto Rico to become the fifty-first state wear blue to show support and approval of the plan. They even paint their homes and businesses, as you can see. And their cars. There's an auto-painting place in the city that does cars in that color. It's a popular cause with about half the population."

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"What about the other half?"

Cesar grunted and bobbed his chin at a large building they were passing. "Those people there are the other half," he said, indicating the parking lot, which was filled to overflowing with an incredible variety of old cars, trucks, station wagons, campers, and vans—most of them dented or rusted, missing a fender or a hood, a trunk-lid wired down, no wheel covers. Each vehicle had a male driver, sitting alone drinking beer from a can or standing outside talking to the man parked next to him or listening to disco music on a portable radio.

"For every man in the parking lot," Cesar said, "There's a woman on line inside to get *cupones*—food stamps. This is the half of the population that *doesn't* want statehood. The freeloaders. They get more welfare benefits as citizens of a territory than they would if Puerto Rico were a state. You notice none of *them* are wearing blue. They wouldn't be caught dead in blue."

At the hotel, they checked in and put their plan into motion. Cesar made a telephone call and, speaking in Spanish, arranged a meeting for Bannion in the hotel lounge in two hours.

"The woman you're meeting—" he started to tell Bannion, but Bannion interrupted him.

"Woman? The mule is a woman?"

"Why not, man?" said Cesar. "This is the age of equal opportunity, my friend. If women can be pilots and priests, they can be dope smugglers too. You'll meet her in the lounge at four. She'll be wearing a white-linen pantsuit with a coral blouse. She'll be carrying a shopping bag containing several packages with San Juan department-store wrappings on them. You two will have a drink together, you'll give her the shoebox full of money in the Lord and Taylor bag, she'll leave the shopping bag of packages with you and go. You stay and have another drink, then come back up to the room and start pouring the stuff into the special plastic bags we brought with us. Okay?"

"Okay. Does she speak English, this woman?"

"Like a native. She used to teach third grade in the New York City school system."

Cesar was putting on a fresh shirt and tie as he talked. "While you're taking care of the buy," he said, "I'll drive up in the mountains to Jayuca to see my brother and set up the rest of the deal. I'll be back in time for supper . . ."

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Cesar Navarez drove out of the city on the route that led up and over the Cordillera Mountains. Before the highway began its ascent, it made a straight line through the sweltering sugarcane fields in which Cesar had labored as an adolescent. Beyond the fields it bisected a jungle that began thinly but within a mile or so abruptly thickened into a dark, forbidding wilderness.

Above the jungle, however, after the highway had climbed out of it, the lower plateaus of the mountain were clear and open. At twelve hundred feet, the road was wet and Cesar knew it had been raining. Looking ahead at the higher elevation, he saw the once-familiar low-hanging chartreuse cloud formations, made that color by the sun reflecting off the *espigas,* the wild wheat of the uplands.

The barrio settlement of Jayuca set three miles off the main highway by way of a rutted asphalt road. The first thing Cesar thought when he drove into the village was how much smaller everything looked. Jayuca had once been to him the most exciting place on earth, but that was when he had been a barefoot kid who climbed guava trees for sport. Now Jayuca was no more than a single dirty street, with old men, neglected children, and loose chickens wandering around, while the unemployed young men of the town hung out at the pool hall and drank beer all day. A place for losers, Cesar thought. Losers like his old man had been. And like Jorge still was.

Cesar had no trouble driving directly to the *bohio* where he had grown up, and where Jorge, now with his own family, still lived. He was not surprised to find the *bohio* painted statehood blue. Jorge was probably the only *jibaro* in Jayuca who supported statehood.

Cesar parked the Cadillac in the dirt front yard and got out. Two children, a boy and a girl, stopped playing and stared at him. The boy reminded Cesar of himself twenty-five years earlier. They were obviously Jorge's children—the family resemblance was too striking for them not to be.

At the screen door of the *bohio,* Cesar knocked. Luz, Jorge's wife, opened it. Her mouth dropped open at the sight of him.

"Hello, Luz," he said with a smile.

"Hello, Cesar." Luz was a slim woman with an exquisite mouth and wide, attractive shoulders. Her hair was black as a crow's wing, waist-length, and she let one side fall loosely across her face to partially hide a badly pockmarked left cheek.

"Those two yours?" Cesar asked, bobbing his chin at the children.

"Yes. The boy is Martin—" she pronounced it Mar-*teen* "—and the girl is Estelle." Luz held the door open. "Please—come in, Cesar."

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The inside of the *bohio*, Cesar saw, had changed considerably. It was not as crowded with beds and cots as Cesar remembered it—there were a few pieces of discount-store furniture he had never seen before and Luz had made attempts to brighten up the place with variety-store wallpaper and a few plastic-framed prints. There were also several partitions placed to give the illusion of rooms. In the corner allotted as the kitchen, Cesar noticed that Luz was preparing *alcapurias*—dumplings made from banana plants. How many hundreds of times, he thought, had he and the whole family had nothing but *alcapurias* for supper? Now, after twenty years, Jorge and his family were still eating it.

"I'll call Jorge for you," Luz said. "He's out back in the field."

"Never mind," said Cesar. "I'll go out there and see him." He started out the back door but paused and turned back. "You look good, Luz," he said quietly. "As good as you did when you were fifteen."

Luz looked away, refusing to meet his eyes. She kept on with her work and did not respond.

Cesar found his brother a hundred yards in back of the *bohio*, tilling the dark-brown soil of a small patch of land on which were growing several rows of coffee-bean shrubs. The patch had once been part of the huge coffee-bean plantation for which their father had worked until the day he died. Now it was abandoned land, free to whoever wanted to use it. Mostly it was untended and its soil had become impure with erosion and rocks and waste. All except the patch Jorge Navarez kept. That patch was still cultivated, and Jorge tended it lovingly. When Cesar walked up, Jorge was on his knees, tilling around the bushes with a hand tool. When he looked up and saw his brother, he stopped working and sat back on his heels.

"Hello, Cesar. You look prosperous."

"Hello, Jorge. You look tired."

Jorge shrugged. "I work hard. In the cigar factory at night, here in my coffee field during the day. But you know, Cesar, the more tired a man is from his work, the more blessed and wonderful rest is to him. Do you ever get so tired, Cesar, that the simple act of resting is luxurious?"

"Never," said Cesar. He smiled slightly. "Not from work, anyway. I see you have two kids now."

"Yes. The boy, Martin, reminds me a great deal of our little brother

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Felix when he was growing up. Remember how Felix was always building things with sticks? Martin is the same way."

"Where is Felix now?" Cesar asked.

"Dead. He was killed in Vietnam. I have a medal inside that they sent, if you'd like to see it."

"Maybe later," Cesar said. He decided not to ask about their other four brothers and sisters.

"Did you come back home to hide again?" Jorge asked. Once before, ten years earlier, Cesar had returned to Jayuca after he had killed a man in New York. He had a serious knife wound at the time. It had become infected and had taken a long time to heal.

"No, I haven't come to hide," Cesar said. "I'm here on business. I've come to offer you an opportunity to make some money."

Jorge shook his head. "I don't want your kind of money, Cesar. To get it, I have to live your kind of life and I cannot do that. I'm too honest. And too afraid."

"To get this money you do not have to live any kind of life except your own. You have only to work one day, doing the same thing you always do. You don't have to be dishonest and you don't have to be afraid. There's absolutely no way you can be caught. And you can earn five thousand dollars."

Jorge stared at his brother. Five thousand dollars, to Jorge, was an enormous amount of money. Not only could he buy many things he wanted for his family—a washing machine for Luz, real beds instead of cots for the children, a television set—but he could also purchase chemicals and some additional tools to properly restore his patch of coffee-bean land. He had done his best over the years using leftover fertilizer from the tobacco fields, tilling by hand, pruning with ordinary household scissors, but he knew the soil would never come back all the way without more expensive methods.

Jorge stood up and looked out over the small patch. "This is the field Papa used to tend, remember? When you and I were boys, Cesar, the coffee beans that grew on this field were so rich and choice the entire crop was reserved for the Vatican. Remember that?"

"Yes. Papa used to say every night that the Pope was drinking coffee made from beans that he grew. I remember too that Papa himself had to drink coffee made from waste beans."

"That didn't matter to Papa," said Jorge. "He was proud of the coffee beans he grew."

Sure, thought Cesar, Papa was proud and what did it get him?

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And you, Jorge, you're still the dreamer you've always been, and what has it got you? Losers and dreamers—they were all alike.

"Let me tell you how you can earn the five thousand dollars," Cesar said quietly, feeling that the time was right.

It was a very simple plan, Cesar explained. He and his partner were buying a quantity of heroin in San Juan and needed a way to smuggle it back into New York. Each of them was allowed by U.S. Customs to bring back one hundred cigars. They had designed and had made for them before leaving New York a supply of plastic bags the size and shape of a ballpoint pen. As soon as they got the heroin, they would put it into these cylindrical bags and seal them. Then they wanted the bags rolled into cigars that would pass through Customs unsuspected. The tobacco odor would neutralize the detection prowess of the Customs narcotics dogs, which could sniff out heroin even through plastic.

"Can you roll two hundred cigars in one day?" Cesar asked.

Jorge shrugged. "If the tobacco leaf is good—not too dry but not too moist either."

"We'll let you buy the tobacco yourself at the market in Poco. We'll pick up four boxes of Coronas in town, throw away the cigars, and use the boxes and wrappers for the ones you roll. What do you say, brother?"

Jorge sighed and looked down at the ground. With the toe of one scuffed work shoe, he worried a broken twig lying there. "I don't know, Cesar," he said reluctantly. "Drugs are a bad thing."

"Drugs are a way of life for some people," Cesar said pragmatically. "People who want drugs will always get drugs. If not at one place, then at another."

"I know that. I just hate to think that maybe what I do is going to hurt some poor person I don't even know."

Cesar put a hand on his brother's shoulder. "Most likely you'll be helping, not hurting. Look, Jorge, you don't know how it is up there. In Spanish Harlem and the South Bronx it's another world, man. There aren't any happy smiling little kids playing barefoot in the dirt like you've got down here. Up there the kids are street-tough, street-hardened, street-smart. They live in a world of apartments without heat, a world of family court and social workers, a world of trouble—trouble in school, on the job, with the cops. Every day is a struggle, a battle, a war; and every night is a dark time to dread the next day. This stuff that I deal in, it helps get people through those nights."

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Jorge was still not convinced. He wanted the money, but he also wanted to be able to continue living with himself. "I can't give you an answer without thinking about it, Cesar," he said at last.

"I can't wait long," Cesar warned. "This is Saturday, so you don't work tonight. I'll drive back up in the morning, after you've had time to think about it. If you decide to do it, we'll go to the Sunday market at Poco and buy the tobacco. You can do the rolling in our hotel room—there's a table and plenty of water. You have the tools you need, right?"

"Yes, I have my own tools for cutting and shaping and rolling. All right, Cesar, I will think about it and let you know in the morning."

Cesar left him there at the edge of his little coffee-bean patch and walked back to the *bohio*. Luz was still preparing the banana-plant noodles. "I just told Jorge a way to make some quick money," he said. "Encourage him to do it, will you?"

"Jorge is his own man," Luz said. "He will make up his own mind without my help."

Cesar went over and stood very close to her. "Have you ever told Jorge that I had you before he did?"

Luz closed her eyes tightly. "No."

"I haven't told him either," Cesar said pointedly. He patted her arm. "I will be back in the morning. Encourage him for me, Luz."

He left the *bohio* then and drove back down the mountain to San Juan.

That night in bed, lying up close to Jorge's back, the two of them like two spoons in a drawer, Luz said, "Are you going to tell me what Cesar asked you to do?"

"No," Jorge replied.

"Is it something bad?"

"Yes," Jorge said.

They fell silent. Across the *bohio*, in their own little partitioned areas, Martin and Estelle slept peacefully. Outside, the night sounds of the high jungle wafted in the air: a night hawk, a fox, a spider monkey at play.

"If you did what he wanted, would you be in any danger?" Luz asked.

"No." Jorge adjusted his position, and Luz did the same. "Why do you ask about danger? Do you think I should do it as long as there is no danger?"

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"I know how badly you would like to have money for the land," she said.

"The land is a dream," he told her. "That's all it's ever been. A man needs a dream to keep going. If I got the money, most of it would go for the family."

"But some would go for your dream," she said.

Jorge smiled in the darkness. "Some," he admitted. "A little."

Luz hugged him tighter. "Good," she said, "because I like your dream. It is my dream too. And we are Puerto Rican Blues," she reminded him. "Someday, when statehood comes, all our dreams will come true."

"Statehood, yes," he said quietly, almost wistfully. "The end of the rainbow."

Once again they fell silent. Jorge could feel Luz's heart beating steadily against his bare back—her hands lay still on his shoulders, her breath was soft on his neck.

"Jorge, there is something I must tell you," she said at last. "It is something I have wanted to tell you for a very long time, but I have not had the courage to do so."

"Is it about you and Cesar?" he asked. At once he felt her heartbeat increase. "About you and Cesar sleeping together when you were fifteen?"

"He told you," she said bitterly.

"No. Someone else did. A long time ago."

"Why didn't you tell me you knew?"

"I thought it might hurt you to know I knew. You were so very young when I found out. And after a while, I just forgot about it."

"Didn't it matter to you, Jorge?"

"It mattered," he admitted. "But not enough."

He thought he detected warm tears on his back after that, but he wasn't sure.

Much later, just before she drifted to sleep, Luz asked, "Will you go with Cesar in the morning?"

"Yes," Jorge replied.

The next morning when Cesar drove through Jayuca, Jorge flagged him down halfway through town. "I came in to the metal shop to get my tools sharpened," he told Cesar, getting in.

"You're going to do the job for me then," Cesar said, smiling. "Good. I knew you would."

Cesar turned the Cadillac around and drove back toward San

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Juan. Just outside the city, he detoured to Poco, where a huge outdoor trading market was located. Farmers from the surrounding area brought their produce, poultry, sugarcane, tobacco, and other products to sell at stalls they rented from the town council. It was the only market allowed open on Sundays, and all stalls had to close between ten and eleven in the morning while the church across the square conducted Mass.

Cesar and Jorge got to Poco well before ten, and Jorge shopped for tobacco with the sure eyes of one who had handled the leaf for many years. He had been a stacker and bundler as a young boy, then a harvester as an adolescent, finally an apprentice cutter and roller as a young man. Now he was one of the best hand-shapers of cigars in the entire factory. He knew the leaf by texture, touch, aroma, and instinct. Luz had once marveled at how much he knew about tobacco when coffee was his first love. Jorge told her that a man learned what he *had* to learn to survive, but that he loved only what he *wanted* to love.

After Jorge had selected enough leaf for two hundred cigars and Cesar had paid for it, they put the bundle in the trunk and drove the rest of the way into the city. Cesar parked the car in the hotel lot and Jorge carried the bundled leaf as they walked into the lobby. The tobacco was tightly wrapped in burlap, a parcel the size of an overnight bag.

As Cesar and Jorge waited for the elevator, four men dressed in suits crossed the lobby from outside and waited with them. They all boarded the elevator, but only Cesar pressed a button for a floor. He glanced nervously at the men as the car glided up to eleven. When the door opened, two of the men took his arms firmly while the other two did the same with Jorge.

"You're under arrest," one of the men said to Cesar. "Which is your room?"

"You're making a mistake," Cesar protested. "I'm a cigar importer in San Juan on business—"

"You're a heroin smuggler, señor," the man said. He twisted Cesar's arm behind his back. "Now tell us which room you are in, and whether your partner is armed."

"All right," Cesar said as the pain shot into his shoulder. He was not afraid of pain—he merely decided that then was as good a time as any to start working on getting a light sentence.

"Eleven-fourteen," he said. "He is not armed. Listen, I want to cooperate—"

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Cesar and Jorge were handcuffed, and two of the men stayed with them while the other two went down the hall to eleven-fourteen to get Bannion and the heroin.

Jorge was back home by two o'clock that afternoon. "Did it go well?" Luz asked. Jorge had opened up to her about the plan that morning.

"Yes," he said. "I talked to the Jayuca constable this morning and he notified the federal officers. They followed us from the Poco market to the hotel. I was arrested along with Cesar and the other man. Then at the justice building we were all separated. They took some information from me and let me go."

"And the reward? How much will it be?"

"It will depend on how much heroin there was," Jorge told her. "Probably about a thousand dollars, they said. We'll get a check once it's decided."

Luz nodded. "And Cesar? What will happen to him?"

"He will go to federal prison in the States. They said he would probably get a long sentence because he has a bad record."

"Will he know you informed on him?"

"No. As far as he'll be concerned, they just let me go because there was no evidence against me. All I did was buy tobacco and walk into the hotel with it."

As they were talking, their young son Martin burst through the door.

"Papa! Papa! Come see what I found!"

Jorge allowed himself to be pulled by the hand out to the side of the *bohio*. There, cowering in some weed, was a little mongrel puppy, unwashed, trembling with fear and hunger.

"Where did it come from, Papa?" Martin asked, wide-eyed.

"He probably wandered away from his litter and got lost," Jorge said.

Martin gripped his father's hand tightly. "Papa, can I please keep him? Can he please be my puppy?"

Jorge looked down at his son and the years raced backward in his mind. He saw himself as a boy, saw his own father, saw a mongrel dog of another time. He felt a warmth in his chest.

"Yes, you can keep it, Martin." He scooped up the puppy and put it in his son's arms.

"Oh, Papa, isn't it a nice little dog!" Martin exclaimed.

"A very nice dog, son."

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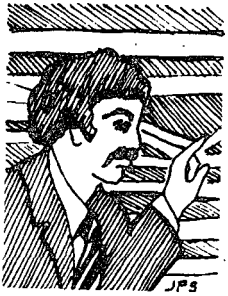
"Papa, did you ever have a dog when you were little?"
"Yes. Once."
"What happened to it?"
"Someone killed it one night."
"A bad man?"
"He became a bad man, yes."
"Did he ever get punished for it?"
Jorge nodded solemnly. "Oh, yes, Martin. He got punished."
Jorge led his son into the *bohio* to get a dish of milk for the new puppy.



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a *NEW* short story by

JEAN DARLING

Harry Hoban was worried about his age—and his looks. Before the month was out, he would be thirty and he didn't even have a girl friend, let along a wife. His lack of education combined with soaring unemployment kept him riding his bicycle every day to his laborious, unrewarding job at the petrol station, where his workmates were beginning to treat him as though he was simple-minded because of his daydreaming. And then, out of the blue, he encountered the sign about the auction . . .

HARRY HOUDINI'S TROUSERS

by JEAN DARLING

Twice daily, rain or shine, Harry Hoban peddled along the Dublin quays. It had been the same ever since Harry quit school at fourteen to work at the Parkgate petrol station. Now, fifteen years later, he was still filling tanks and fixing flats for a salary three times larger than his starting pay with half the purchasing power. And he was worried.

He was worried about his age—before the month was out he would be an old man of thirty. He was worried that he didn't even have a girl friend, let alone a wife. Most of the lads he had grown up with were well into raising the standard of living for their burgeoning families. But his lack of education combined with soaring unemployment kept Harry nose-to-tire-iron scared that one oblique move might put him in the queue with the other yokes out of a job.

He was worried that he spent so much time daydreaming that his workmates were beginning to treat him as though he was simple-minded. And then there was his appearance. Barely five foot five,

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with a squat muscular body, Harry avoided his frizzy-haired reflection except when shaving.

Then, one morning as he was riding along Arran Quay, Harry noticed a chalked sign in front of Stevenson Auctions, Ltd. It read:

WEDNESDAY AUCTION
MEMORABILIA OF THE FAMOUS
CLOTHES, LETTERS, BOOKS
AUTOGRAPHS, PAINTINGS
COSTUMES, CHINA, ETC.
TOMORROW AT 2 P.M.
Viewing Invited

The last two words curled themselves around Harry's imagination, chained his bike to the shop's wrought-iron railings, and carried him into another world.

Tables, showcases, and racks displayed items identified by hand-printed white cards. Occasionally an explanation was typed beneath the name of the celebrity. As though in a trance, Harry moved from one object to another, reading a name here and there. He touched a dainty toe slipper that had been worn by Margot Fonteyn, stroked a leather-bound copy of *Man and Superman* autographed by George Bernard Shaw, wondered how tea would taste if sipped from a fragile Belleek cup once owned by Kitty O'Shea, whose charms had led Parnell to ruin. He passed by racks of gowns worn by opera singers, actresses, and titled women to look more closely at the toppers and overcoats. Paintings, vases—everything imaginable that could have belonged to the famous was here.

In edging between two tables, Hoban's boot became entangled in the worn fringe of a throw rug. In recovering his balance, he brought down several hangers from an overhead rack—one of which held a pair of formal striped trousers. They were pinned to the padded-wool hanger, suspenders looped around each side, and the name HOUDINI leaped into focus. Below the hand-printed name was the legend: *Harry Houdini, world-renowned Escapologist, wore these trousers during performances at the New York Hippodrome—Spring 1925.*

"Harry Houdini!" Hoban held the trousers against his waist. They were perfect, as though they were made for him. Of course, they were old-fashioned, no belt loops, but the moment his fingers touched the cloth strength flowed into him and he knew he had to possess them.

He hurried to the rear of the shop, where a man sat behind a desk

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entering postal bids into a ledger. "I want these pants," Harry said. "How much are they?"

"Sorry, sir, everything will be auctioned tomorrow at two P.M. If you're unable to attend, I can put you down for a book bid." The auctioneer's pen was poised.

"I want them now," Harry insisted. It was getting late, almost five to eleven—he would have to hurry if he was going to be on time for work. He threw two wrinkled fivers on the desk. "Is that enough?" The dealer eyed the bank notes with distaste.

"This, sir, is a specialized auction for sincere collectors of memorabilia. We have a palette used by William Orpen, the famous painter, letters from Winston Churchill, gloves worn by Sarah Bernhardt—nothing can be sold before the auction." Harry totaled his assets: Post Office Savings, salary due, the money in his pocket plus the two fivers lying on the desk like discarded gum wrappers.

"Will you take a hundred and three pounds?" Harry asked, slicing his assets in half so as to have some bargaining power. The dealer shook his head and refolded himself in his chair. Harry started to raise the offer in tens until the man interrupted.

"It's just not possible, sir. Everything must go under the hammer. As I said, if you are unable to be present tomorrow, you may leave a book bid." He gestured to the ledger. "Or you might prefer to phone in your offer. Here's my card. I'm Browne, Declan Browne." He indicated his name printed on the right side of a purple oblong of lavender. "Or Mr. Stevenson himself will be glad to assist you."

Right then Harry decided to steal the pants.

After exchanging obscenities with the man he was seven minutes late to relieve, Harry settled into a round of tank filling and tire fixing while trying to figure a way to make off with the pants. Having never before taken so much as a pin, his intended thievery presented problems, so at the first lull he sought enlightenment in the newspapers.

Both the *Press* and the *Independent* were chock-a-block with assorted crime, from armed bank-robbery to slashing motorcycle seats, but as none of the modi operandi fired his imagination, Harry—being a timid man—decided he would hide in the shop until the auctioneers went home. He pleaded sudden illness to the front supervisor and, borrowing an overcoat because he was having chills, Harry set off on foot.

Luckily, the shop was crowded when he arrived, his cap pulled

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well down over his eyes. He was taking no chances on being recognized by Declan Browne. But he needn't have worried. Browne was as busy as a dog with two tails, rushing from one viewer to another answering questions about various lots.

Pausing to examine an item here and there, Hoban sidled toward the red-velvet curtain that draped the entire left side of the shop. On reaching it, he glanced around. Everyone was intent on studying merchandise and marking catalogues. Satisfied that he was virtually invisible, Harry dropped to the rug to check the space between the cloth and the wall. There was ample room for him to lie between them, so like a chunky snake he slithered out of sight unnoticed.

After repeated assurances from Browne to Stevenson and Stevenson to Browne that the burglar alarm had been well and truly set, the outside door clicked shut behind them, leaving the shop palely lit by the street lamp nearby. Harry checked the time. Six-thirty showed eerie-green on his digital watch. Best to stay put for a while in case one of the men came back, Harry thought, and drifted off to sleep. One thing he could always do was sleep—no matter the pressure.

A sudden noise startled him awake. He peered under the velvet. It was a Garda patrolman checking the lock. He cupped his hand between showcase and forehead and squinted into the shop. Harry ducked back under the curtain and after a moment he heard the ta-clunk, ta-clunk of his footsteps going away. Best grab the pants and hightail it through the door at the rear, Harry thought scrambling out from under the curtain.

His hand closed around the pants, still pinned to the padded hanger. Just before he went through the door marked STORAGE/OFFICE, he picked up a few small items. Undue attention shouldn't fall on the theft of Houdini's pants and the other bits and pieces were heavy enough to sink nicely into the sludge at the bottom of the River Liffey.

The rear room presented a jumble of packing cases, furniture, period clothes, china, paintings—all casting frightening shadows. To make matters worse, wind-tossed trees skreeked against the windows. At one time, all the buildings along the quays had been private houses and their small tree-filled back gardens still opened onto a narrow laneway. As a safety measure, the firm guarding the area insisted that this lane be well lit before taking the responsibility of protecting Stevenson Auctions. Both grill-covered windows

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as well as the padlocked door showed large red seals that read *Safety Secured by Securigard.*

"Best stay away from those, me lad—one touch and all hell'll break loose," Harry whispered to himself, turning away to investigate the possibility of finding a way out through the Men's Room. It, too, was a cluttered mess of boxes and junk. Tall screens were folded along both walls and a clogged washbasin dribbled a dark patch onto a rolled rug. Worst of all, there was no window.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, what am I going to do?" he prayed. Back in the office, sweating under the borrowed overcoat, he sagged against the corner of the strewn desk, Houdini's trousers trailing from one hand. The only way he could see out of here was to hide behind the curtain and try to sneak out after the shop opened in the morning. "I ask you, are you worth all this?" Harry asked, lifting the pants high in front of himself.

Once again it seemed that strength flowed into his veins exactly the way it had that morning. After a moment, his heart slowed its mad tattoo, the sweat on his forehead began to dry, and he knew that somehow Houdini would help him if he put on the pants.

As his work-soiled body would defile the treasure, Hoban settled for folding the trousers lengthwise into a band and pinning them around his waist, carefully tucking the suspenders inside. With the overcoat buttoned around his swollen middle, Hoban felt ready to lick the world. This newfound confidence carried him into the Ladies' Room, where he found the narrow window he'd hoped to find in the Men's and squeezed out through it sideways.

For the next week Harry read every newspaper he could get his hands on looking for some mention of the robbery at Stevenson Auctions. He found nothing except their usual ad in the classifieds. Still, his heart triphammered every time a car pulled in for a fix. The only place he was relaxed was at home, locked in his room after tea. There, with the trousers nearby, he felt calm, able to shut out the noise of his younger brothers and sisters and the shrill voice of his widowed mother. Able to make plans for a new life.

The first thing would be to give notice where he worked. Next he would have to find somewhere to live by himself. He needed a place where he could concentrate, someplace secluded. Magicians were a solitary lot—real loners, he recalled from when Tony Curtis's portrayal of Houdini had set him reading everything available on magic in the library. For several years after that, Harry dreamed of seeing

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his name in lights: The Great Hobani. But daydreaming was as far as it had gone. He never bought a trick, never rolled a coin over his fingers, never even touched a deck of cards. The only remnant of the fantasy left was a magic book he had traded some bicycle clips for back then, while still in school. As far as he remembered, it was squirreled away in the bottom of the wardrobe he'd shared with his eldest sister. He would have to find it—it would come in handy now.

The accommodation Harry decided on was in the center of a derelict area near Harold's Cross destined for the bulldozer at some future date. All the street windows had been bricked in against squatters, giving the once lovely Georgian townhouse a woebegone look. But by scrambling onto a low roof at the rear it was possible to climb in through a window and up to the top of the house, where he found exactly what he wanted.

He put his sleeping bag in the room, where wind-blown seeds were sending up shoots on the sill—in summer it would be a readymade window box. The other room was larger with a skylight. That was where he would work.

It took a few days to get the bits and pieces necessary to set up housekeeping and move the few clothes he owned to the new place. He lay in a store of peat for the fireplace, bought a camp stove and a ladder. During the day the ladder could be hidden in the long grass—once inside, he would pull it up after him. And as far as the plumbing was concerned, he had a choice of bathrooms in good repair and the water had not been shut off.

And so it was Harry Hoban disappeared with the dead man's pants.

The first night in his new home, Harry sat cross-legged on the floor in front of the fire, waiting. But nothing happened. Yet he knew Houdini expected something of him, else why would he have been chosen? Of course, he didn't look unlike the Master. He was the same height and build: five foot five and well muscled. All this was in the book he had rescued from the mess in the wardrobe—there was even a picture of Houdini stripped naked except for chains and padlocks, his hands manacled in a strategic position.

Harry stripped, wound himself in belts and neckties, and studied the result in a piece of broken mirror he'd found in one of the downstairs rooms. With his frizzy hair and broad face, he could have been the man himself. Next he tried on the pants, which fitted as though they had been tailor-made for him. Bare-chested, the suspenders

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looped over his hips, Harry again faced the mirror. I'm here waiting, Master Houdini—what is it you want of me? he thought. He stared at his reflection, trying to make his mind blank to receive a message back from beyond. Nothing happened.

At last, when the fire had gone out and Harry was beginning to shiver, the word "hypnosis" flashed in his mind. This was the sign he had been waiting for.

First thing next morning he peddled to a shop in Capel Street that stocked all kinds of out-of-the-ordinary books and bought one on hypnosis. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't reach the trance state. This led him to the conclusion that another method of making contact with the spirit of Houdini would have to be found.

He was aware of the fact that in later life Houdini had been obsessed with proving whether the dead could make contact with the living. He had given his wife Bess a code by which she would know beyond doubt he had been able to reach her from beyond. She had failed. That was why, Hoban decided, after years of searching for another medium, the great man had chosen him. His sensitivity plus the similarity of their names was all the verification the Irishman needed. He was to be the link. Why else would he have been drawn into Stevenson? Why else would he have stumbled and, in catching his balance, found the pants in his hand? Why else had he kept the magic book, filled with so many biographical details—including most astonishing of all, the very words by which Houdini would identify himself: Rosabelle believe.

In order to pass the days while seeking how to prepare himself to be a receiver, Harry decided to build a Tip-Over Trunk, a trick Houdini used when he was still playing Dime Museums. The plans were in the book, so all Harry had to do was take a few packing cases from the White Heather Industrial Estate nearby, buy a few tools, hinges, trunk hasps and corners, and a bit of paint. But his progress was slow. Harry was no carpenter. Yet the days passed quickly enough and the nights were occupied with trying to find a way to meet Houdini on his terms.

Narcotics, even cannabis, were dismissed out of hand. He remembered reading a story by William Irish about a man spaced out on marijuana, who did horrible things. Besides, Harry was terrified that he would become addicted if so much as an aspirin passed his lips. Then he recalled the day he'd found his kid brother with his nose in a plastic bag. There were a half dozen other boys with him, all of them sitting against a fence sniffing away. "Glue, man," his

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brother had said, looking at him with bleared eyes. "It's really super, you know, and not addictive." Nor had it seemed to be. Glue, then, Harry decided, was the answer.

On his third try with glue, Houdini made contact.

Harry was sitting against the aborted Tip-Over trunk, sniffing by firelight, when he looked up to see a hazy face staring at him out of the mirror. It wavered and shimmered and was difficult to see because Harry's eyelids kept dropping. But it was Houdini—he recognized him immediately by the dark frizzy hair and broad face.

"Is it youself, Harry?" Hoban asked, his voice slurring.

"Rosabelle believe," a voice not unlike his own answered.

"What is your wish, oh Master," Hoban asked in the manner of a genie he'd seen on some Arabian-nights opus on TV.

"You must have a Bess. You need her to help you make the Tip-Over Trunk. But she must be a Jewish girl." The voice was a mumble but Harry understood every word. "As I am Jewish and Bess was Catholic, you being Catholic will understand why she must be Jewish if you are to take my place." Then the voice fell silent, which was just as well—Harry was snoring loudly in glue-induced sleep.

When he awoke the next afternoon, though he was still muzzy, Harry set out for Terenure West to find himself a small dark girl. It took until almost closing time at the pubs to find her. She was sitting on a worn velvet bench in a dark corner drinking a shandy. She was alone and seemed out of place in the bar. Harry bought a pint and sat down beside her. "By yourself?" he asked. Without smiling, she nodded.

Until the bartender called Time, Harry talked fast to the silent girl. He explained that he was a famous magician and escape artist, describing Houdini's escapes from straitjackets, handcuffs, wet-sheet packs, the milk can, and the packing case in New York Harbor. On seeing her attention was well and truly captured, he inquired if she was Jewish. After a moment she nodded, a frown creasing her brow. Then she rose and left through the heavy oak door.

"If you'd like I could take you to my place and show you some magic tricks," Harry said, catching up with her and matching his step to hers.

She stopped walking and fixed him with her wide trusting eyes. "Do you know the trick where a lemon is cut open and there is a pound note inside?" the girl asked. It was Hoban's turn to nod, though he had no more idea than she did how the lemon trick was

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done. "Will you show me how to do it?" she asked. Again Harry nodded. "And sawing a woman in half and the one where a girl floats in the air, will you show me those too?"

By now they were standing in the bus queue. "I will, of course," he promised. After the bus arrived and Harry paid the conductor, he told the girl his name to keep the faltering conversation going.

"Harry Hobani—that really does sound like magic. I'm Elizabeth Klein." She shrugged away the ordinariness of her name but Harry's heart leapt. He had found the right girl! Elizabeth—Beth—Bess!

"I'll call you Bess," he said.

"With a name as dull as Elizabeth, one nickname is as good as another," she said.

When they got off the bus and Bess saw the row of blind houses they had to pass to get to where he lived, she held back a little, but Harry assured her that all magicians sought isolation. He told her she could trust him like her own father. He promised again to reveal all the mysteries she had puzzled over. And in this way they reached the house and he was able to coax her onto the ladder and up to where the partially built Tip-Over Trunk lay on its side.

"I'm cold," Bess said.

"Sit here," Harry said, bundling his sleeping bag into a cushion. "I'll get a fire going." He gave her tea and fancy cookies, all the while quoting great chunks from the magic book, speaking over her small voice each time she asked to be shown the magic tricks he had promised.

Finally she got to her feet. "I have to go now or I'll miss the last bus," she said.

"Don't go!" He caught her hand. "You can sleep here by the fire. I'll bed down in the other room."

"My parents will chew me out now. It doesn't go down well with them when I'm late." She withdrew her hand.

"Look, you wanted me to show you some magic. Wait a minute—let me show you a trick before you go." He moved around the room, picking up a sock, a nail, the bag he'd last used for glue—anything to give him time to think. Under no circumstances could he let her go. Houdini would never forgive him. The girl was perfect—even down to her name. Once more the word "hypnosis" came to his mind. And he knew beyond any doubt that Houdini had wanted him to learn hypnosis in order to keep this girl from leaving.

"All right, I'm ready," he said, holding out his hand. "Come here

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ɔ me now." Tentatively, Bess came toward him. Stretching his eyes ɾide, he stared into hers. "Look into my eyes, deep into my eyes— ɔeep, deeper. Hear the sound of my voice and relax.—Relax," he ɪtoned as he moved closer to her. For a few moments Bess stared t his white-ringed irises before fear pumped a series of small ɔreams from her throat and she ran away from him, down the dark tairs. Catching her heel in the ragged rug, her flailing hands caught t the wormeaten bannister. The rotten wood crumbled and she lunged two flights down to the foyer below. "Bess!" Harry shouted, ounding down the stairs after her. "Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Carrying her with some difficulty back up the stairs and arranging er on the rumpled sleeping bag, he propped her lolling head with he magic book. "Why did you try to run away?" he asked her. "What m I going to tell Houdini? You were his idea not mine." He looked t her, half resentfully. No one would guess she wasn't merely sleep. Maybe he could tell the Master she was taking a nap. It was lie, of course, but one lie more or less—

That was it! He wouldn't even mention finding a Bess. After all, e was under no obligation to tell Houdini anything he didn't want ɔ tell Houdini. He had never even thought of contacting the great ɪagician, it had all been Houdini's idea. And, he decided, deliberting on it further, if the girl was nowhere to be seen, no questions ɾould be asked.

When he returned from closing Bess into a downstairs room, he ased himself onto the floor, falling asleep as he settled.

After two days of avoiding contact from the outside world, hunger rove Harry out for supplies. He went on foot to a nearby shop, topping for a newspaper on the way back. And there she was, trustɪg eyes and all, on the front page of the three morning papers eneath the printed question: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS GIRL?

"Holy Mary, Mother of God," Harry breathed.

"How's that?" The half deaf, half blind news dealer cupped her ar. Harry didn't answer, he just grabbed a paper, dropped down a ɔin in the metal cup, and raced back to his room.

Barricaded inside again, he wedged himself in a corner and opened ɪe paper. His amazement grew as he read the reasonably accurate escription of himself as the last person witnesses had observed with lizabeth Klein before she had disappeared. Harry had always conidered the pint more important than the peoɹle in a pub. He screwed is eyes shut and tried to recall what the barman who had pulled is pint had looked like but all he could remember was a fist around

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a foaming glass. How could so many people have remembered his build and coloring? He had no memory of anyone in the pub or on the bus that night.

He followed the advice at the bottom of the column and turned to page six. And there he was, frizzy hair and all! Harry stared at the slightly distorted picture. It was him, all right, but he couldn't remember ever having had his picture taken. He had always had a funny feeling about his face being printed on a piece of paper and whenever he saw anyone with a camera he made himself scarce. Had he read the caption under the picture he would have realized the photograph was made by an identikit. But he was too overwhelmed by the knowledge that he was now beyond redemption to read any further. His picture was in the paper for all the world to see. He never could go outside the old house again, never could ride his bicycle along the quays again as long as he lived. If he did, they would find Bess and he would have to tell.

"Rosabelle believe," he whispered.

Somehow everything had gone terribly wrong. He wished he was back at the petrol station, filling tanks and changing flats. He wished he had never heard of Houdini. Tears spilled down his cheeks. What'll I do when the food is gone? he wondered, wishing he had bought more chocolate bars. He loved chocolate.

During the flurry of elections a year later, both sides pledged to unclog City Center traffic. This being the least expensive promise to keep, the winning party prevailed on several contractors to level derelict blocks into parking lots, including the one near Harold's Cross. It was while scavenging for valuable salvage before the bulldozers moved in that Declan Browne of Stevenson Auctions, Ltd. discovered the two bodies as well as the pair of formal striped trousers, lot number and description card still attached. So that's what happened to them, he thought.

"They were among some items stolen before an auction a while back," he told Lieutenant McCann at Dublin Castle later that day.

McCann whistled appreciation as he read the card. "The Great Houdini's trousers! I imagine you're glad to get them back—they must be valuable."

"Ah, you know how it is, Lieutenant," Browne shrugged. "Most of what we buy and sell is authentic, of course. But some of it—you don't know for sure. Who's to tell one dead man's pants from another?"

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The teller sounded polite and nice. But appearances can be deceiving. Mrs. Whittier had learned that in her seventy years . . .

SOFTIE

by ROBERT M. DAVIS

Mrs. Whittier had been using the same Beacon Hill bank for thirty years, but this morning she hesitated at its entrance, squinting through the glass doors with apprehension. It was a busy branch, the usual lines at the tellers' cages. Next to the writing tables with their stacks of withdrawal and deposit slips stood Mr. Higgins, the guard. Through the open door of the manager's office she could see Toby Peterson on the phone. Mrs. Whittier had known Toby when he was a chubby little boy. Now he was a chubby little man, forever unruffled and amiable. She liked Toby.

Each month Mrs. Whittier walked down to the bank and cashed her social-security check. Then she would splurge on lunch and tourist-watching in Quincy Market. The routine seldom varied—the exchange with the teller, the quick hello from Toby, the Market. But this month's visit, she knew after encountering Mr. Norton on the way, would be different.

She didn't recognize the two tellers on duty, but given the rapid turnover of employees at the bank this wasn't unusual. She was to go to the teller on the right. Mr. Norton had been very specific.

Deciding that any more dawdling would be fatal to her resolve, Mrs. Whittier pulled against the handle of the door that seemed to get heavier each month and entered the bank. Mr. Higgins nodded like the former doorman he was.

The pen at the writing table was dry as usual. Mr. Higgins kindly procured a fresh one. While Mrs. Whittier was carefully filling out a withdrawal slip, the teller on the left glanced at the wall clock, smiled, and displayed a sign that read NEXT WINDOW PLEASE. His deserted customers grudgingly obeyed. Mrs. Whittier joined the line before the remaining teller in the tenth place. She wondered if she could endure the wait.

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"Most inconsiderate," the elderly unshaven man in front of her said, gesturing with his social-security check. His breath reeked of alcohol. "The tellers shouldn't take their lunch at the same time as the rest of us. We have important business to do."

Mrs. Whittier flashed him a weak smile of agreement, clutching her own social-security check and the withdrawal slip. The amount on the slip made her tremble, but Mr. Norton had assured her that nothing could go wrong.

The teller, a pale dark-haired young man with horn-rimmed glasses (exactly as Mr. Norton had described him), was asking an overdressed blonde woman for identification. She fumbled through an enormous purse while the line shifted and coughed.

"Is my driver's license good enough for you, honey?" she asked.

"That will do just fine," he said. He sounded polite and nice. But appearances can be deceiving. Mrs. Whittier had learned that in her seventy years.

"Softie!" Toby Peterson called from his office. "How are you doing?" Of all days, when she wanted to be inconspicuous, for Toby to be so boisterous!

"I'm fine," she said in a weak voice. "My arthritis is kicking up, but I manage to get around."

"Same old Softie," Toby said, reaching for a ringing phone.

Andrew had been wrong. Toby had turned out splendidly. When the Petersons used to visit at the old Louisburg Square house, Andrew, whose judgments of people were always harsh, had pronounced that Toby was a "dumb kid."

It was Andrew's harshness that had engendered her nickname. Whenever she tried to make him see the other person's point of view he had called her "Softie." Somehow the name took hold in Boston society. Even the *Transcript* had used it. "The Entertainment Committee was headed by Mrs. Andrew Whittier, known affectionately to her friends as 'Softie.' "

Softie. It began as a term of endearment and ended as one of reproach when their son Douglas entangled himself in a fraudulent land-shares scheme that scandalized the city and brought the police to their door, asking Douglas hard questions. Then came the night when Andrew broke open the locked door of the garage and found Douglas in the Auburn speedster, its motor running. Douglas had taken the easy way out. "You were too soft on him!" Andrew had shouted at her afterward. "You spoiled him!"

This young teller in his paleness reminded her of Douglas. If Mr.

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Norton was correct, he was like him in other ways. The easy buck. Perhaps he too had been spoiled.

"This guy is very clever," Mr. Norton had warned her. "But you needn't worry. There's no way he'll ever know you were working for us. Of course, if you don't feel strong enough for this assignment, I'll understand."

Mrs. Whittier had straightened her back and given Mr. Norton her iciest stare. Not strong enough! Despite Andrew's charge of softness *she* had been the strong one during the Depression when they were forced to sell the Louisburg Square house and rent on the wrong side of the Hill. It was she who had taken a job to keep them going. Andrew just sat around and cursed Roosevelt. And after Andrew died she had been strong enough to carry on all these years.

"I'm not afraid, Mr. Norton," she had said, "but why do you want an old woman like me to catch your crook?"

"Some of our senior citizens aren't as sharp as you," he'd explained. "If they ever discover they've been palmed counterfeit money they forget who did the palming. Like I said, he's clever. We've transferred him to several branches but we've never been able to get the goods on him. But *this* time," Mr. Norton assured her triumphantly, "he's met his match." Meaning himself.

"Well," Mrs. Whittier said, "I suppose it's my civic duty. It's a terrible thing to cheat old people."

Mr. Norton cleared his throat. "Right. Well, then—here's the plan."

It was a very simple plan. Mrs. Whittier had no trouble grasping the details. Mr. Norton was very patient, asking questions to make sure she understood. Did he think she was feeble-minded?

But now, waiting in line, she wondered if she had the nerve to go through with his instructions.

The unshaven man ahead of her cashed his social-security check and sprinted for the door. Mrs. Whittier had a good idea where he was headed.

"Next."

The sign at the teller's window identified him as Mr. Gunther. The iron bars of his cage made it easy for Mrs. Whittier to picture Mr. Gunther in jail. Douglas had nearly gone to jail but had taken the easy way out. She stepped forward and handed Mr. Gunther the social-security check and the withdrawal slip.

Mr. Gunther pushed some buttons on one of those new-fangled

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machines. "You realize, Mrs. Whittier, that this will close out your account with us."

Say as little as possible, Mr. Norton had cautioned, don't give yourself away.

Mrs. Whittier stared coldly at the teller. "I realize that."

"The bank will be sorry to lose your account. But you must have a good reason."

"Just give me my money, if you please."

"Of course." Mr. Gunther gave her a troubled stare. He had a sensitive face. She wondered how long he would stand up under questioning when Mr. Norton presented him with the evidence. She wondered if Mr. Gunther would consider taking the easy way out.

Then it came over her, the softness. She leaned forward and whispered through the bars. "They're going to get the goods on you. Don't try to palm your phony money off on me." She remembered some advice the family lawyer had given Douglas. "I'd skip town if I were you."

Mr. Gunther managed to become even paler. His head cocked to one side as if he was doing some elaborate mathematical calculation. "Mrs. Whittier, did a man approach you on the way here and claim to be working for the bank?"

"Yes, he did. And you've met your match in him, young man. Skip town before it's too late."

Mr. Gunther grabbed a phone and whispered some excited words that she couldn't make out.

"Softie! Come here!" Toby Peterson was at the door of his office, beckoning firmly.

Once she was inside, he closed the door—then he touched her gently on the shoulder. "Of all people, Softie. What are you doing mixed up with con men?"

"What are you talking about, Toby? Are you involved in this racket too?"

"Me? I'm trying to put a stop to it! The police have been after this character for a long time." Toby rubbed his palms. "But now I think we've got him."

"You sound like Mr. Norton."

"Is that what he's calling himself this week? It's a very old con, Mrs. Whittier. He approaches some—some civic-minded citizens like yourself on the way to the bank, usually on the day the social-security checks arrive in the mail, and tells them he works for the bank and is trying to catch a crooked teller. They can help by with-

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drawing everything in their savings accounts and giving it to him. He'll give them a receipt, of course."

"He said I could take the receipt to another branch and reclaim my money. They'd use the counterfeit money Mr. Gunther gave me as evidence against him."

"Our Mr. Gunther's an honest man, Softie. The money would have been real. Your money. Where was this guy going to meet you?"

"Over there by the parking lot." Mrs. Whittier went to the window and pointed out the tall figure of Mr. Norton pacing up and down the curb. "There he is. You mean he lied to me?"

Toby jabbed at the digits on his phone. "Tell me, why did you decide to tell Gunther everything?"

"I didn't want to see him go to jail."

"Same old Softie. Good thing or you'd be minus your life savings. Sergeant, this is Toby Peterson. You were right. He just tried to pull the same trick at our branch. I hope your men are watching. He's got a witness in my office."

Replacing the receiver, Toby joined Mrs. Whittier at the window. He tugged her elbow. "Watch this, Softie," he said.

Through the window Mrs. Whittier saw several men leap from a car and surround Mr. Norton.

"Oh, dear," she said very wistfully. "He seemed like such a nice man."

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

BIBLIOGRAPHIES FROM ABROAD: From England comes a privately printed paperback, *Here Be Mystery and Murder* by Ethel Lindsay, an annotated title-and-author index to 748 nonfiction books in the mystery field, excluding Sherlockiana but including true crime. It's not complete by any means, and the book contains more than its share of typos and author quirks. It's surely the only bibliography to carry the listing: *Who's Who in Crime Fiction. Nigel Morland. Alas, not published.* But it does contain some valuable data on little-known British books that may be of interest to collectors. It's available at a cost of two pounds plus postage from Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Road, Carnoustie, Angus, DD7 7QQ, United Kingdom.

For readers of French there's another bibliography of a hard-boiled writer available from Roger Martin (Fanzine Hard-Boiled Dicks, 1 rue d'Halanzy-Piedmont, 54350 Mont-Saint-Martin, France). This one covers William Campbell Gault and includes an interview with the author, photographs, articles on Gault, and even a short story by him in addition to a complete bibliography. Too bad this fine series isn't available in English.

THE BAKER STREET JOURNAL: We often mention mystery fanzines in this column, and it's time we took a look at the father of them all, *The Baker Street Journal.* Since the appearance of its first issue in 1946, under the editorship of Edgar W. Smith, this "irregular quarterly of Sherlockiana" has listed some notable writers among its contributors, and if their efforts are sometimes frivolous they are always lively. The *Journal* has a new editor now, its fourth, in the person of Peter E. Blau, who helped organize the 1980 Bouchercon in Washington. The June 1982 issue, the first under Blau's editorship, published the radio script of John Dickson Carr's "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," the only adaptation of a Sherlock Holmes story ever done by Carr, with an introduction by Douglas G. Greene. Subscription is $12.50 a year ($13.50 foreign) and it's published by Fordham Univer-

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sity Press, University Box L, The Bronx, NY 10458.

MURDER FOR CHRISTMAS: It seems a bit late to be reviewing an anthology of Christmas stories, but *Murder for Christmas*, edited by Thomas Godfrey, is really a book for all seasons. Its 26 stories, by just about every classic writer in the mystery field, are interspersed with a wealth of special features—lists of Christmas novels and films, cartoons by Gahan Wilson, poems, puzzles, and Christmas lore. The 465-page volume is available at $19.95 from The Mysterious Press (139 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019). And watch for *Tomorrow I Die*, the first collection of Mickey Spillane short stories, coming soon from The Mysterious Press.

MURDER MYSTIQUE: Eleven top crime writers and editors contribute informative essays on their craft to *The Murder Mystique*, edited by Lucy Freeman (Ungar, $6.95 paper, $11.95 cloth). From Ken Follett's reflections on "The Spy as Hero and Villain" to Thomas Chastain's "The Case for the Private Eye," the essays are uniformly good. It's a book deserving a wide readership among mystery scholars and fans.

MARGARET MILLAR: Two of Margaret Millar's best novels, *How Like an Angel* (1962) and *A Stranger in My Grave* (1960), are again available, in trade paperback editions at $5.00 each from International Polygonics, 200 East 27th Street, New York, NY 10016. It's good to have them back.

FANZINE: A small (12-page) fan publication, *The Drood Review of Mystery*, contains articles and reviews in the field. It's available at $4.00 a year (nine issues) from Jim Huang, The Drood Review, Box 8872, Boston, MA 02114.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: A new Dick Francis novel, *Banker*, about an ingenious plot to discredit the stud value of a famous retired race horse, will be published by Putnam this spring.

William Peter Blatty's first new novel since *The Exorcist* is titled *Legion*. It's about a series of brutal murders and is due from Simon and Schuster in August.

Michael L. Cook's 1,500-page historical guide, *Mystery, Detective and Espionage Magazines*, is now scheduled for November publication by Greenwood Press.

A third sports mystery by Shannon OCork, *Hell Bent for Heaven*, has an unusual rodeo setting. It'll be out this spring from St. Martin's Press.

Joe L. Hensley, recently re-elected as a circuit-court judge in Indiana, is finishing a new novel tentatively titled *Trial Book*.

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"Q"

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Visual grandeur rich in melodrama touches awaits the mystery visitor at the newly opened Epcot Center in Florida's Walt Disney World. It is an extraordinary kaleidoscope of the emerging wonders of the future spectacularly achieved by master illusionists—with no shortage of thrills from the past. One exhibit envelops you in the steaming jungles of a prehistoric earth in all its dark violence, as storms rage and a volcano erupts, an incredibly realistic vision of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. A stagecoach holdup is done in lifelike audio-animatronic figures as is a World War II submarine patrol.

Films that totally surround you on a 360° screen bring viewers to such mysterious far corners of the earth as China's Forbidden City and Tibet. A boat trip down a jungle river in the Mexican Pavilion glides one back into the mists of time, while along the shore temples loom in the twilight and natives prepare for human sacrifice. A Bavarian village square, a rugged Canadian forest, a Parisian street in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower—all suggest to the imaginative stroller settings for countless pulp adventure.

Then, a gleaming monorail whisks visitors to the Magic Kingdom area of the theme park, where the visions of melodrama truly overwhelm! The Pirates of the Caribbean, looting and pillaging, hacking at one another as harbors burn behind them, is the best and bloodthirstiest of all dioramas, straight out of Stevenson. The Haunted Mansion mixes together the chills from every variant of ghost story to terrify the visitor, as does a timid journey through Snow White's dark forest of the night. One can relive Tom Sawyer's fugitive flight and the undersea wonders of Jules Verne's Captain Nemo. To the mystery lover, Disney's thrill-filled recreations of classic childhood melodrama weave a very special magic.

There is spectacle and melodrama to be found on New York's Off Broadway as well, in a cheerfully bizarre new musical called *Little Shop of Horrors*. The title is a familiar one to film buffs, for it is also the name of a 1961 movie quickie by thrill-master Roger Corman which has become a cult favorite. Both stage play and film cover the same territory: in a seedy Skid Row florist shop a dimwitted but likeable clerk discovers a plant which not only feeds on human blood but grows alarmingly. Indeed, in the stage version, a splendid visual effect during the final moments has the plant seemingly overwhelm the set and the audience too! Our hero, after finding the carnivorous plant in a dark

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ghetto street and discovering its appetites, is driven to feeding it those enemies standing in the way of a hopeless romance. Alas, all does not go well, except for the plant, which thrives, grows huge, yet is insatiably hungry. A simple and actually somewhat bloody story (the first-act curtain is surprisingly grisly), but author-lyricist Howard Ashman's touch is so light and clever that this unusual musical has great charm. Returning back to its origins, the play will soon be a movie again.

Mystery audiences should also look for the Samuel Goldwyn Film Classics Retrospective now touring art theaters in major cities. The Goldwyn Studio, unfortunately, made few mysteries, but three are included in the series—three rare thrillers that are welcome rediscoveries.

Bulldog Drummond is a 1929 adaptation of H. C. McNeile's dashing character—already the hero of a string of novels and a hit stage play by McNeile and Gerald du Maurier—with Ronald Colman starring as a properly flamboyant hero. Captain Hugh Drummond is a demobilized army officer who advertises in the Personal columns that he is bored with peace and inactivity; he seeks adventure —legitimate, if possible, but crime, if humorous, will be considered. Answering the ad is beautiful, terrified Phyllis Benton (Joan Bennett), whose uncle is being held prisoner in a private hospital run by the evil Carl Peterson. Drummond is properly dashing, his scarf flapping behind him as he speeds to the rescue, sure of himself even when surrounded by enemies. And he is not above dispatching villains himself, for he cheerfully strangles a doctor with a taste for torture who has dared to experiment upon Phyllis.

Interesting attitudes of morality also arise in the other Goldwyn mysteries, the 1930 *Raffles* and its 1940 remake. Both films tell essentially the same story: gentleman thief Raffles, on the edge of retiring, agrees to one last job to aid his debt-ridden friend Bunny: to steal a necklace during a country weekend party. Alas, a suspicious Scotland Yard inspector is waiting to reel him in "like a trout." Although Ronald Colman in the first film is a somewhat troubled Raffles, he makes a magnificently lighthearted escape at the end, dodging the men of the Yard by using disguises and secret panels. David Niven is a cheerier Raffles in the remake, but even though the disguises and sliding panels occur here too, because of the Production Code installed since the first film the ending differs a bit.

Reform, in either case, seems not far off, for Raffles in both versions falls in love, and realizes "There are other kinds of adventure —better kinds."

Three long unseen films, good to have back.

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INTERVIEW: BARRY PEROWNE

EQMN: How did the revival of the Raffles stories come about?

PEROWNE: The suggestion that I write new adventures of A. J. Raffles, as a character of the period with which, thanks to his creator the late E. W. Hornung, he was familiarly associated—the turn of the century and onward—was made to me by Frederic Dannay.

EQMN: Did you know Mr. Hornung?

PEROWNE: Personally, no. But an uncle of mine who edited a magazine in early Edwardian times knew him and published stories by him, though they were not about Raffles. I first read about Raffles when I was ten years old, and nobody was more astonished than myself when, long after the demise of Mr. Hornung, I was allowed, by arrangement with his Executors, to write new adventures of Raffles.

EQMN: Have you ever met any of the real people—the great figures—you've fictionalized in some of the Raffles stories?

PEROWNE: I used, an awful long time ago when I was living at a little old inn in the New Forest, occasionally to see Sir Arthur Conan Doyle striding across the heaths on winter afternoons. And I knew his sons slightly—both gone now—as they used to drop in at the inn from the Doyle house nearby for a tankard or two of the best beer in the forest.

And I once knew an elderly schoolmaster who knew Oscar Wilde well in his heyday and told me some interesting things about him. A couple of years ago I was staying at a hotel in Paris, a hotel with an insidiously decadent "mauve decade" atmosphere and decor—and no wonder, for I learned that the hotel had sheltered "Mr. Sebastian Melmoth," Wilde's alias after his fall from grace.

That same schoolmaster, Mr. Digby Lamotte, classics master at St. Paul's School, had had as boys in his class Chesterton, E. C. Bentley, and Compton Mackenzie. He had some interesting stories to tell about that remarkable classroom of his! And especially about Chesterton, a "man of letters" in the truest and broadest sense of that term.

In my very early days in Fleet Street, I saw the unmistakable figure of Chesterton looming up hugely, in a dense fog. He was wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat and a cloak like a matador's. He was silhouetted against the lights in the window of a phrenologist's shop, scribbling away on the back of an envelope pressed to the window. Can he have been writing a piece on phrenology for his *Daily News* column or for his own *G.K.'s Weekly*? I still wonder.

In general, the Raffles stories I've written have been evolved from some experience of my own—dated back in time to a period when I was not actually around to bear personal testimony, but other people were. For instance, the Kipling story—"Raffles and the Shere Khan

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Pouch"—was vetted for me by a very old man, still living in the New Forest, who'd known Kipling in Simla when Kipling was a twenty-year-old journalist there.

EQMN: A. J. Raffles is, of course, one of the finest cricket players in the world. Have you any interest in the game?

PEROWNE: Yes, I've always played cricket. Hornung himself was a keen cricketer from his days at Uppingham School, though he never was as good a cricketer as his brother-in-law, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Neither, needless to say, was I! Still, I was fortunate enough before World War II to have some experience of the kind of country-house cricket Hornung—and Raffles—enjoyed in their time.

They were great fun, those country-house matches—they were a kind of *fête champêtre* without the Maypole and the Morris Dancers—but that sort of cricket, a hangover from feudal times, has almost vanished now. Happily, on the village greens of England and in many parts of the world the game flourishes as much as ever. As played professionally—which Raffles would have scorned to do—it's a big-business spectator sport nowadays in the courts where it's played.

EQMN: You were an editor with George Newnes Ltd. in London for several years. Has that experience on the editorial side of the desk been helpful to you in your writing?

PEROWNE: Extremely so, and for many different reasons.

EQMN: Your *Raffles Revisited* (Harper & Row, 1974) was the first collection of Raffles stories since the final Hornung collection, *Mr. Justice Raffles*, in 1905. What about subsequent collections?

PEROWNE: One called *Raffles of the Albany* was published by St. Martin's Press in the U.S. and Hamish Hamilton in England in 1976. Then came the more recent *Raffles of the M.C.C.*, published in 1979 by St. Martin's in the U.S. and Macmillan in England.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Though he has not gained nearly the amount of publicity and adulation accorded P. D. James and Ruth Rendell, Peter Dickinson belongs in the same class as a crime novelist who can combine style, theme, and depth of characterization with craftily honed technical deception worthy of the classical masters. His latest novel is one of the best examples of his art.

**** Peter Dickinson: *The Last Houseparty*, Pantheon, $12.95. The setting is Snailwood Castle, a stately home considered of no particular historical importance de-

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spite the Countess's famous politically oriented houseparties in the Thirties. The scene shifts between the present (with an aging craftsman offering to fix the elaborate story-telling clock that is the estate's centerpiece) and the last of those houseparties, where something unspeakably terrible happened and changed numerous lives. The plotting shows the author at his most devious, while the style seems not as over-rich as it has sometimes been.

**** Jack Olsen: *Have You Seen My Son?*, Atheneum, $12.95. The contemporary phenomenon of child-snatching is a made-to-order subject for a suspense novel, and Olsen gets full value from it in this harrowing account of Lael Pritcher's efforts to reclaim her five-year-old son Ace from ex-husband Mike. Locales range from Washington and Oregon to Mexico. Olsen writes from a female point of view with extraordinary success. (My consultant agrees.)

*** Robert Barnard, *Death and the Princess*, Scribners, $10.95. Scotland Yard's Perry Thethowan, who solved an embarrassing family murder in *Death by Sheer Torture*, becomes the first Barnard detective to return for an encore. This time he serves as bodyguard to the beautiful but unlikable Princess Helena, a minor member of the British Royal Family. Barnard has done better plots, but his satiric eye is sharp as ever.

*** John Wainwright: *An Urge for Justice*, St. Martin's, $10.95. Two of Wainwright's more memorable characters (Chief Superintendent Blayde of the excellent *Blayde, R.I.P.* and Q. C. Simon Whitehouse of *Man of Law*) come face to face both in and out of court in this novel of the village killing of an elderly woman, who may have been a notorious German war criminal. Wainwright grapples with some of the major moral issues of the Twentieth Century in this novel. Though it is not one of his most successful works, neither is it the trivialization of the Holocaust that some contemporary thrillers seem to be striving for.

*** Ngaio Marsh: *Light Thickens*, Little, Brown, $13.95. In her final Roderick Alleyn novel, Marsh returns to the setting she loves best. Likeable director Peregrine Jay plans a production of *Macbeth* for his Dolphin Theatre, hoping the cast can put aside their fears of the play's supposed curse, while someone among their number seems determined that they will not. Though the murder (a memorable one) and Alleyn do not arrive until after the halfway point, the lovingly detailed account of theatrical life shows the author at the top of her form. The only problem is the solution, not a bad one but too long protracted from the point where most readers will have figured it out.

*** Simon Brett: *Murder Unprompted*, Scribners, $10.95. Actor-detective Charles Paris's eighth case resembles the Marsh novel in that the first portion is taken up with describing the production of a play—one which may finally make a West End star of the aging and alcoholic Charles. Murder—and in

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this case even any particular sense of menace—does not occur until well into the second half. Though Brett is more irreverent and satirical than Marsh, as well as somewhat less skilled at puzzle-spinning, his work should appeal to many of the same readers.

*** Michael Jahn: *Night Rituals*, Norton, $12.95. A series of murders of Cuban teenage girls in New York appears to involve a Haitian or Pawnee sacrifice ritual. As in his well received paperbacks (when he was plain Mike), Jahn provides a vivid Manhattan background and some excellent dialogue and action scenes.

One complaint: there is a little too much "small world" coincidence in his metropolis.

*** Sheila Radley: *A Talent for Destruction*, Scribners, $10.95. Though this village mystery, centering on an English rector and his wife, on whose land a human skull is found in the snow, is nominally in the police-procedural vein, it is really more of a domestic mystery with the accent on character interplay. Chief Inspector Douglas Quantrill, who appeared in two earlier Radley novels, solves the case more by information received than by classical detection. The author's gift for character and background validates her growing reputation as a practitioner in the Ruth Rendell vein. Her publisher, though, has carelessly left off two of the novel's section headings, whose presence would have set off the long flashback sequence more clearly.

** John Eller: *Rage of Heaven*, St. Martin's, $10.95. Charlie Rope, an insistently tough and sensitive New York cop in his second recorded case, looks into the murder of a businesswoman. The tale is well written and neatly paced and features some good policework, but the whole enterprise (including Charlie) has too much of a manufactured aura. The TV series scent is in the air, if not on it.

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DETECTIVERSE

PER-VERSE-ITY

by CAROL CLEMEAU

Said masochist to sadist,
"Ah, beat me, I implore!"
But with a fiendish grimace,
Quoth sadist, "Nevermore!"

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a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS WALSH

Art Carey had tried to warn the two holdup men to drop their guns, and that had been a very serious error. The one in back had got him first around the other man, then twice more after he stumbled to the pavement.

"Pumping those extra two bullets into him," Arnie said. "Big men. I'd like to give them a chance to show how big they really are one of these nights . . ."

THE SECOND MAN

by THOMAS WALSH

They gave Art Carey an Inspector's funeral that Friday. Dutch Schaale, who had been his friend in the department, stood with the other men in front of the church when they were carrying the coffin out, his square German face stolidly impassive. He didn't speak to Nora then, or later on at the graveside. Art had left her with two small children, one still in diapers, but at the cemetery Dutch stood at the fringe of the crowd, his head bent slightly, his big square hands knotted in front of him. There was nothing he could bring himself to say to her. Even the Inspector's funeral didn't really help.

Still, he had to admit that Art had made at least one very serious mistake. He hadn't used his gun in time. He had tried to warn the two holdup men to drop their guns, and that had been a very serious error. The one in back had got him first around the other man, then twice more after he stumbled to the pavement. "Pig!" he had yelled. "Stinking, lousy pig!" Then he and his accomplice had darted off into the darkness. Both had worn masks, so there was only an almost useless description. One of the men had been short and slight, with

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blond hair. The other, the one who had shot Art, was tall and thin, and had run with a slight limp.

"Which will help us a lot," Arnie Auerbach growled that night after the funeral. He and Dutch were staked out in front of an apartment house on East Fifty-third Street, waiting and watching for a well known and badly wanted confidence man named Hank (Sweet Talking Henry) O'Hara. "We don't have a chance in hell of ever getting our hands on them. Poor Art should have shot first, no matter what orders we get from those bleeding hearts downtown. He was a decent man, a lot too decent for this job."

"Yes," Dutch agreed, thinking bitterly of Nora and the two kids, "how Nora's going to get along on the pauper's pension they give us I don't know. But you're right, Arnie, he didn't use his head."

"Pumping those extra two bullets into him," Arnie said after a few minutes, shifting restlessly behind the wheel. "Big men. I'd like to give them a chance to show how big they really are one of these nights."

Dutch nodded. Art had the prospect of forty or fifty years of life ahead of him—good, decent, serviceable life, watching his kids grow up, and loving Nora. But now— Dutch got out of the car abruptly. "I'm going to stretch my legs a little," he said. "Hit the horn if you see Hank, Arnie. I won't be long."

But even in the hallway where he stopped to grab a smoke it was difficult to keep his thoughts in order. He lit the cigarette, standing out of sight back in the hall beside a radiator. Arnie was right. Shoot first and get the questions answered afterward was the sensible way. Identify yourself, sure, but keep an eye on them every second. And the first time they move so much as a finger—

He stubbed out his cigarette and warmed his hands over the radiator bars. It was a bitterly cold night, the February wind whining viciously around the corner at Third Avenue. Through the glass of the front door, he saw a few pedestrians scurry past, their hands in their pockets and their heads down. Dutch had just decided on another cigarette when he heard the front door open and close quietly. Two men had come in. Stopping just inside the door, they started to converse in careful, guarded voices. Dutch drew further back. Better wait a minute, he thought. Let them go their way first.

"Not getting jittery again, are you?" the first one asked in a cool, faintly amused voice. "Just calm yourself here a minute, kid. No reason to let yourself get all uptight."

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"Don't worry about me," the other one said, though he was obviously under some strain. "I'll be okay."

"Sure you will," the other one assured him. "It'll go easy as pie, and I'll be behind you every second. It's too cold for any pigs to be around, so we don't have to worry about that. We'll be in and out of the place in two seconds. Just shove the gun in his belly, and I'll empty the register. It'll be a snap."

"I know," the second one whispered.

"But we'll have to make sure first that there's no one else in the place," Number One said. "We'll walk around there nice and easy now, and look in the window like we're picking out a brand for ourselves. Then when we're sure— Come on."

The door opened, then closed again, and Dutch hurried to the street door just in time to see the tail of a black overcoat whisk out of sight in the direction of Third Avenue. He hadn't seen either of the men at all, but he'd heard the conversation plain and clear. It could have only one meaning. Dutch gave them half a minute, long enough for them to reach the corner, then he darted down the step and over to the car where Arnie was waiting for him.

"Start the car," he directed, shoving his head in at the door, "then follow me. Two guys just came into the hall over there—I think they're planning a holdup around the corner."

Hurrying toward the avenue, he saw two men walking with an uneven gait on his side of the street and pausing before a liquor store that splashed neon light over the sidewalk. The shorter one turned his blond head to look in both directions. Dutch, like any innocent bystander, halted at the curb to wait for the traffic light to change. But when the pedestrian light flashed from red to white, he didn't cross. Three steps out, he turned a sharp right along the line of parked vehicles and sprinted, bent low, after the two men.

In the car, Arnie Auerbach slowly rounded the corner after him. Dutch slipped the gun out of his holster and risked a quick look at the suspects over the trunk of the car between him and the sidewalk. Then, feeling more positive, he moved into plain sight.

"Hold it right there," he ordered curtly. "Right where you are. Turn around."

The taller man did as he requested, even raising his hands without orders, but the small, jumpy one turned quick as a streak. There was just time for Dutch to see the gun in his hand. They fired together, so closely together that there was only one report, and remembering Art Carey, Dutch threw himself down behind the

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parked car. His head smashed against the fender, leaving him badly stunned for a few moments. But he shook his head and, the gun still in his hand, he got up on one knee and risked a second look over the trunk of the car.

It was all over. The short man lay flat on the pavement, his mouth twisting with anguished effort, one arm beating feebly on the sidewalk. The tall one had vanished. Dutch trotted three or four quick steps, still crouched, and then, when the arm stopped beating, straightened up. Arnie shouted at him from the car and he waved a hand back at him to indicate he wasn't hurt. "Get the other guy!" he told Arnie. "Look in the alley!"

The usual gaping bystanders had popped up out of nowhere. "Keep back!" Dutch shouted at them. "Stay out of the way, all of you!"

He knelt by the fallen man, making a hurried examination. But the eyes closed and the mouth had stopped twitching—there was nothing but a very young, frightened face under him. Arnie Auerbach came running up. "He's not in the alley," he panted. "He's nowhere in sight, Dutch. What did you fire for?"

"I had to," Dutch told him. "He pulled a gun on me, Arnie. I had no choice."

"Then we better find the gun," Arnie said. "Where is it? See if it's under him."

A prowl car came racing along Third Avenue, and the two uniformed men in it shooed the bystanders off.

"Look around for the guy's gun," Arnie told them. "He must have dropped it somewhere around here when Dutch shot him."

They looked along the curb for it, and then knelt to look under the cars. One of them searched through a nearby trash can and the other shone his flashlight into the nearest doorways. They looked everywhere they could think of within a fifty-foot radius of the car. But it was no use—there was no gun.

"What the hell could have happened to it?" Arnie asked. "It's got to be here if he was carrying it. You're sure there were two of them, Dutch?"

"I saw the gun," Dutch said. "And I saw the other guy, too. He was tall, skinny. Had a funny walk. —That damned gun! It's around here someplace—it's got to be!"

"Sure it is," Arnie said, but now he avoided Dutch's eyes. "We got to look some more, that's all. Don't worry, Dutch. We'll find it."

But they didn't. More men came from the precinct, but it was no use. An ambulance took the body away. The precinct men scattered

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out and examined the block from end to end. A little guy came out of the furniture store near the corner and got permission to drive his pickup truck away. The bystanders, who had kept their distance, slowly went their separate ways. The men continued to look everywhere, into every storefront and hallway, but in the end there remained the one vital element—no gun.

"No gun?" Inspector Carmody said the next day. Carmody was a tough headquarters Inspector, popularly known to his men as Chilly Charley. "Then what was it you fired at, Schaale? I'd like to know."

"I guess at the flash in his hand," Dutch said. "He pulled the gun out just as he turned, Inspector. There wasn't much time."

"One shot fired," Inspector Carmody broke in curtly. "According to witnesses, there was one shot, that's all. You went and gunned down an eighteen-year-old boy without giving him a chance. There'll be all hell raised about this, you know."

"But he pulled a gun," Dutch insisted. "He did, Inspector—I saw it. I heard it!"

"Nobody else did," Chilly Charley said. "You'd better find that gun, Schaale, and real quick, too. Because if you can't, you're going to be in one bad mess. That boy came from a respectable family, was never in any kind of trouble before. You'll be brought up before the Board on charges if you can't account for that gun."

But that was only the beginning of it. The afternoon newspapers came out, and one of them had a leading article on police malfeasance and brutality by Neil Farraher, its resident genius. Once again it said the City of New York found itself ashamed and distressed by what seemed to be the irresponsible action of a policeman. A thorough investigation would have to be made in the death of Fred Gillies, who, apparently alone and unarmed, had been shot down without warning by one of its police officers. The boy had no police record. He was barely eighteen years old and had never been involved in any kind of trouble before. Serious and drastic steps must be taken to get at the full truth of the matter. It could not be swept under the rug, as had so many police investigations in the past. And that afternoon, at the precinct house, Dutch had to turn in his gun and his badge, and go home to await trial.

He lived alone in a two-room furnished apartment in Murray Hill. There he lay on the sofa day after day, waiting for the trial to come up and going over again and again what had happened. There had been two men. He couldn't possibly be mistaken about that. Arnie

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had taken the corner too slowly to see them. And Fred Gillies *had* carried a gun.

Then what had happened to it? It hadn't vanished into thin air, certainly. But where could they look for it that they hadn't already?

If, of course—and the thought struck him like a dash of icewater across the face—the gun had ever existed at all in true fact! Perhaps Art's death had more effect on him than he had realized. Could he have imagined the whole thing—the men in the hallway, their whispered conversation? At the death scene, could he have been tricked by a flash of some kind of light against the boy's hand and jumped to the conclusion it was a gun?

Then began the true torment—his doubt of himself. Night after night he prowled the apartment, peering blindly out the front window at one moment and then the back one, rubbing his head wearily. Everything became confused to him. He was no longer sure of what he had witnessed that night.

Meanwhile, Neil Farraher kept after the story. He discovered that Fred Gillies, the only child of an elderly doctor, had been a model teenager. Always a hard worker, and always at the top of his classes in high school and college, he was considered to be one of the brightest and most promising students at Columbia University—quiet, liked by all his friends and fellow students. Yet with all the promise in the world, he had been shot down in cold blood by a police officer who apparently didn't deserve either the rank or the title. Farraher could only hope that this new example of police arrogance and stupidity would not be swept airily to one side, as so many other police investigations had been. He promised his readers he would keep after the story until justice was done.

One night a few days before the trial was to begin, Arnie Auerbach stopped by to see Dutch.

"How's it going?" he asked, though one look at Dutch Schaale gave him the answer.

"Not so good," Dutch had to admit. "According to Farraher, I gunned down that kid with no reason—I just shot him down like a dog."

"Well, that's Farraher," Arnie said. "Forget him, Dutch—you've got a lot of people pulling for you—they just don't have a daily newspaper column to sound off in. If we could only find the damned gun the kid had, you'd be home free—you could have Friend Farraher apologizing to you in the Mayor's office."

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"If," Dutch said, and grinned crookedly. "It happened like I said, Arnie. We fired together—that was why the witnesses heard only the one shot—and then I ducked back of the car, hit my head against the fender, and knocked myself out for a couple of seconds. When I came to and got over to the kid there was nothing to be done."

"You might have been out longer than you think," Arnie suggested. "You admit you were out cold?"

"I'm pretty sure," Dutch said listlessly. "But what would that prove?"

"Maybe a hell of a lot," Arnie said. A slight, sharp-faced man with an exceptionally quick mind, he had always been a helpful working partner to Dutch in their two years together. "You heard these two guys talking about sticking up a liquor store. You followed them and did what you had to do. The kid fired at you, you fired back, and before you could think it was all over."

"But no one saw the other guy," Dutch said. "Even you. Who's going to believe he ever existed?"

"You didn't have to be out long," Arnie persisted. "Just half a minute, maybe. But it could have been long enough for the second guy to grab the kid's gun and get out of there. He sees you fall down, just like the kid fell down, and he thinks you must have killed each other. The witnesses didn't come running until the shots were fired. They were shocked and confused. They could easily have missed seeing the second guy. He'd have ducked into an alley as quick as he could."

"I don't know," Dutch said, gripping his hands between his knees and staring down at them. "I just can't say, Arnie. But if I was knocked out for a few seconds—"

"Long enough for him to grab up the gun and, with you apparently dead, too, long enough to picture a nice big murder rap hanging over his head if he was caught with it. So what does he do next? He gets rid of the gun right away."

"But we looked all over for it," Dutch said, his voice flat with hopelessness. "Along the avenue, in all the cars in the vicinity, in the sewers, the trash cans—"

"No, we didn't," Arnie said, pointing a finger at him. "We looked *under* the cars. Then the guys came from the precinct, and the ambulance came, and there was a lot of confusion all around. And he couldn't have put it *in* a car, either. It was freezing out, all the windows were down and locked.

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"But suppose there was a truck there—say an open-sided pickup truck? Do you remember anything like that being along the curb?"

"There *was* one," Dutch remembered. "The owner came out after the thing happened—he runs a little furniture store near the corner. He was a scared little guy—he wanted to get out of there and home to the missus."

"How long was that after the shooting?"

"Half an hour maybe," Dutch said. "I don't know. Sometime after the ambulance took the body away."

"Which means that he probably took his truck and drove it away without anyone checking it out." Arnie was excited. "I'm going to call the precinct."

The precinct reported back in an hour. The furniture dealer's name was Jacob Morris, and his home address was in Babylon, Long Island. When they called there, the wife answered. Jake, she said, was on a buying trip in the Amish country down in Pennsylvania and was not expected back until tomorrow afternoon.

So the next day, for the first time in quite a while, there was something to occupy Dutch's time. He even felt some faint hope. But when Jacob Morris returned home, a meticulous search through his rickety old truck, item by item, produced nothing.

"What are you looking for?" asked Morris, coming back out of the house as Arnie and Dutch were about to leave. "A gun?"

"Why?" Dutch said, hope soaring up in him again. "Did you find one?"

"Not me," Morris said. "My son did. He's only nine years old, and he was keeping quiet about it because he knew if I found it I'd take it away from him. But when he heard there were policemen here searching the truck, he decided to come clean—little gonnif." He held out an ordinary .38 automatic, in good condition and apparently brand new. "Is this what you want?"

By nine-thirty the next morning they had traced the gun. It had been registered in July to one Thompson Knowles of 22 Earlimont Avenue, Riverdale.

It was a small brick apartment house. Arnie went upstairs alone to Apartment 3E to investigate.

"Listen to this," he reported to Dutch half an hour later, settling himself back into the driver's seat again. "I think we've got the so-and-so dead to rights, Dutch. He's a Columbia student, like Fred

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Gillies was. I asked him if he knew him—said I was investigating the murder. He said they had one class together but he hadn't known him well. He's got some interesting books. One's called *The Revolutionary Privilege*, and there were a couple of others dealing with Democratic Revolutionary action, and so forth. I didn't let on we have his gun. Let's get back to the precinct. They'll turn up everything there is to know about him in half an hour."

And they did, with Chilly Charley doing his bit, and pulling a string here and there. By next morning they had found out that Thompson Knowles was a known student activist who'd been arrested twice for disturbing the peace and once for incitement to riot. The FBI had a file on him in which he was described as a notorious cop hater and a man to keep under close watch at all political rallies.

"It's beginning to fit together," Arnie crowed when the news came through. "There *was* a second guy with Gillies—Thompson Knowles. He got rid of the gun by throwing it in the truck, being scared to get caught with it, thinking maybe you'd been killed, too. But Morris drove away before he could come back and retrieve it. He must be sweating blood right now, wondering if we've found the gun and traced it to him."

"If we take him in, he can always say Gillies stole it from him somehow," Dutch pointed out.

The two men sat in thought for some minutes.

"Farraher," Arnie said.

"Farraher! Neil Farraher? What about him?"

"He can help."

"Fat chance. How?"

"He wants justice, he says. He's seeing this story through, he says. Let's give him a chance to do it."

Arnie looked at the clock. "It's not too late to give him something for the afternoon edition. We'll give him the information that we suspect the missing murder gun is in a pickup truck presently doing business rounds in Pennsylvania—the owner's due back sometime late tonight, and the police hope to contact him in the morning if not before. Include Jacob Morris's address out in Babylon. Meantime we call Morris and have him keep the pickup hidden until late tonight, then park it in back of the house, and retire at his usual time. We'll keep the house covered."

Dutch nodded. "You think Knowles will make a stab at retrieving the gun?"

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"I do. And I think he's following Farraher's coverage very, very closely."

Farraher was happy to have something new to print on the case and the story appeared as presented to him by Arnie Auerbach in the afternoon edition.

When the last light went out in the house in Babylon at ten o'clock that night, the pickup was in the driveway. Arnie was across the street, the car invisible in the shadows of another driveway, and Dutch Schaale was sweating out the minutes in the darkness of Jake Morris's garage.

It was a long, worrisome wait. By half past eleven almost everyone in the neighborhood had gone to bed. The streets were tomb quiet. A dog barked now and again and an occasional car passed, but one o'clock came and then two—but no Thompson Knowles.

By two-thirty, Dutch was ready to give up on the thing. It had been too good to be true. Knowles wouldn't show up to recover the gun he knew would be traced to him. If they brought him to court he'd simply do what Dutch had suggested this morning—claim that Gillies must have stolen the gun without his ever knowing about it. And Farraher would probably say the police had fabricated the whole thing to cover up for one of their own.

At about a quarter to three he decided to go out and talk Arnie into calling it quits. Thompson Knowles probably suspected a trap and had never given a thought to coming out here.

Shutting the garage door quietly behind him, he started silently down the driveway. There a voice stopped him—a soft, careful, mocking voice.

"Well, well, what do you know? Just what I was afraid of. All ready and waiting for me—after I took such care getting here so nice and quietly too."

Knowles' pale, hating face was dimly visible between a dark jacket and black knitted cap. "Get back off the driveway, pig, and make it real quiet if you don't want to get it the way you gave it to Fred the other night." He limped past him and backward, leading the way.

"And you gave it to Art Carey," Dutch said, voicing a hunch that had been with him since he'd tracked the two men to the liquor store on Third Avenue.

"No way you're going to pin that on me, pig."

"Why were you and Gillies pulling these robberies?" Dutch asked,

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praying Arnie would come over for a check soon. "To support your political activities? Or just greed?"

The sneering laugh reached him again through the darkness—and, worse, the sound of a gun being cocked. They were at the truck now. Dutch's heart began to thump in slow, heavy beats. "Take it easy, Thompson," he said. "You don't think I'd be foolish enough to come out here alone. I've got a back-up."

"Some back-up. Where is he? It took me an hour to get over here through the shadows from my car two blocks away. There's no one but you and me, pig. Pretty soon there'll just be me. Get clear of the truck now, and close your eyes if you want to."

"You'll wake up the neighborhood."

"This gun has a silencer on it. Step away from the truck, I said. Here we go—"

"I don't think so," Arnie Auerbach said from the shadows behind Thompson Knowles just before tackling him to the ground.

They celebrated at the precinct house the next day and a new Dutch was the life of the party. Carmody came and joined in. Before they broke up, Arnie proposed a toast. "It behooves me to do it," he said. "To Neil Farraher—without whom this arrest might not have been possible."

Dutch raised his glass, smiled affection at Arnie, and said, "I'll drink to that. You never know where your back-up is coming from."

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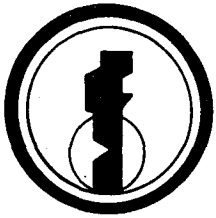

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a *NEW* short story by

BARBARA CALLAHAN

Theresa McFadden was the target for Mary Grimes' long litany of shamefuls. It was "shameful" the way Theresa led her poor husband Colum around by the nose. Theresa was carrying on something "shameful" with the handsome young Father McBride. She'd seen the two of them sitting "shamefully" close together. Some women were Satan's weapons against the vocations of God's chosen ones.

A story about faith and charity from the acutely observant and sensitive Barbara Callahan . . .

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS WOMAN?

by BARBARA CALLAHAN

I'm not like most of the others here in this sad place for old people. I come and go as I please. The newspapers often write about me. They print articles and publish a photograph captioned *Have you seen this woman?*

After I was returned here today and tucked back into bed, my roommate, Lydia Osborne, slid a scrapbook from under her quilt and read to me from a clipping she'd cut from this morning's newspaper.

" 'Theresa McFadden, age 72, wandered off the grounds of the Freiling Nursing Home at 2 P.M. yesterday while the staff was involved in an emergency. Mrs. McFadden, five foot six, 135 pounds, was wearing a blue dress and a yellow cardigan. Anyone who has seen a woman fitting this description is asked to call Upper Township Police.' "

Propping herself up on a spindly arm, Lydia said, "Now for my

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version, Theresa." She smiled. " 'Theresa McFadden, age 72, walked purposefully off the grounds of Methuselah Manor yesterday at 2 P.M. while the staff was involved in a crisis centering around the decision to turn the TV channel to "Municipal Hospital" or "Claudette Humphrey, M.D." Mrs. McFadden, five foot six, 135 pounds, was wearing George Burns designer jeans and a tee-shirt reading Oldie but Boldie.' "

I wanted to laugh at Lydia's supportive little recital and to tell her there would be no more newspaper stories about me in the future, but I was too tired.

Lydia didn't mind. She had helped me solve the riddle of my wanderings and knew I'd tell her what had happened after I had rested. Often during my recent pilgrimages to my old neighborhood, I'd thought of her—my sedentary friend crippled by arthritis—and drawn strength from her encouragement.

Before I'd ever told her, Lydia knew I had unfinished business to complete. She sensed that the periods of confusion attributed to senility by my children and doctor symbolized an urgent need to set something right, something long-forgotten and struggling to surface while there was still time.

When Dorrie, the nurse's aide, scolded me the previous time I had "wandered off," Lydia silenced her in the voice that had once quieted hundreds of high-school English students.

"My dear Dorrie," she had said, "the music snapping around in that headset you wear when you take us non-ambulatories on outings has short-circuited your brain. You can no longer respond to signals, either auditory or visual. Before Mrs. McFadden ever 'wandered off,' as you put it, she used to pace up and down in this room. Anyone whose senses had not been yeah-yeah-yeahed into galloping catatonia could have detected that Mrs. McFadden had set up a training regimen."

"For what?" asked Dorrie.

"For a marathon, dear Dorrie, for a marathon. She has miles to go before she sleeps."

That evening, as Lydia basked in the afterglow of Masterpiece Theatre, I asked, "And why do you think I have miles to go before I sleep?"

"Because you feel guilty about something," she answered. Then, shaken by the force of her honest answer, Lydia had gasped, "Forgive me. I shouldn't play bedside-psychologist. It's just that your compulsive pacing reminded me of someone else's obsessive behavior."

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"Whose?"

Squirming, Lydia answered, "Lady Macbeth's. She washed her hands over and over after she had participated in the murder of a king. Not that I think you murdered a king, Theresa—nor a queen or a jack, for that matter."

"But there are all kinds of murder, aren't there?" I said.

The arrival of a nurse with our sleeping medication ended the discussion. Obediently, Lydia swallowed her pills, grateful for the truce with her ravaged body, but I simply pretended to take mine. By morning, I knew why I had aimlessly wandered first from my suburban home and later from the nursing home. Unconsciously, I'd been trying to return to St. Andrew's Catholic Church in the city to reclaim an object I'd hidden there years ago, an object belonging to Mary Grimes.

After breakfast, Lydia listened intently to my story of parish life in the Forties and Fifties. When I finished, she said, "One of the reasons I've remained a non-churchgoer is to avoid the pious hypocrite—Molière's Tartuffe, if you will, the archetypal character who must profane the sacred. This Mary Grimes you've described is a feminine Tartuffe. Although she doesn't deserve your forgiveness, I can understand your need for peace. So go ahead, Theresa. Find whatever it is you feel you must return to Mary Grimes. The weather's good and you'll soon find your opportunity to escape this place."

The opportunity occurred yesterday afternoon when most of the staff was involved with the admission of a new patient, a patient who had been discharged from a hospital to come here and die. For the first time I left the grounds of the nursing home with confidence that I wouldn't be found sleeping on the porch of a house near my old neighborhood or hiding in the restroom of an all-night diner as I had in the past. When a lovely young woman pulled her car over to the bus stop outside the gates of the nursing home and offered me a ride to City Line Avenue, I knew I'd make it to St. Andrew's.

At City Line Avenue, I used some of the spending money my children gave me to buy a cup of coffee and a doughnut while waiting for the bus to the city. My children, Liz and Kate, have always been upset about my wanderings. "You'll get yourself killed someday, Mother," Kate had said. "The city's not the same as it was in your day. None of your friends live in the old neighborhood any more.

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There's nothing there for you now." I couldn't convince either of them of my need to return.

Not long after boarding the D bus, I passed familiar streets with familiar shops whose windows were covered with plywood. By the time I reached my stop at Tenth and Chadwick, I had counted fourteen stores linked to my chain of memories. Invigorated, I left the bus and started walking the three blocks leading to St. Andrew's. Children playing hide-and-seek stared curiously at me as I greeted one of them: "Hello there, Johnny. It's me, Mrs. McFadden."

"Man, that old woman must be sniffing some pretty powerful stuff," he said to his companions as I walked on. "She called me Johnny and I'm Dwayne Jones, future basketball star and scorer of thirty points a game in the N.B.A."

N.B.A., N.B.A., N.B.A. The letters resurrected others that had thundered through my brain when I left the police station after my husband's fatal accident—D.O.A., D.O.A., D.O.A.

Of all the things they told me at the precinct about Colum's car slamming into a tree on West River Drive and careening into the river, about the rescue effort that lasted several hours, only the last sentence, "He was D.O.A. at the hospital," lodged in my mind. Dead on arrival. D.O.A.

On the day of Colum's death, the letters D.O.A. ended all my sentences: "You must tell my children, Monsignor O'Brien, that their father was D.O.A." "You must tell the neighbors, Mrs. Griffey, that Mr. McFadden was D.O.A." You must tell Mr. Hughes, the undertaker, Theresa, that Colum was D.O.A.

The children's voices drifted away and I suddenly felt very tired. Stopping beside a brownstone with nicely swept steps I saw a plaque on the door that read Johnston & Son, Morticians. A plaque used to be there that read Vincent J. Hughes, Funeral Director.

I sat down on the steps and recalled voices at Colum's viewing, especially the voice of Mary Grimes, the pillar of the parish, who had stagewhispered during the recitation of the rosary, "It's absolutely shameful. They're giving him a Christian burial and everyone knows Colum McFadden committed suicide."

"Hush, she'll hear you," Margaret Cavanaugh had scolded.

Later, when I left Colum's side to take an aspirin, I stood next to the door leading to the restrooms and heard more of Mary's litany of shamefuls.

"It was shameful the way Theresa led poor Colum around by the nose, God have mercy on his soul. All those evenings when she went

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to the rectory, leaving him to care for those two dear children, telling him she was doing the parish bookkeeping, she was carrying on something shameful with that handsome young Father McBride."

"Do I detect a wee bit of jealousy, Mary?" someone asked. "Could it be that you're concocting a story about Theresa and Father McBride because Father McBride ignores you?"

"I'm not concocting a story," Mary retorted. "I'm stating a fact. And the fact is that every Tuesday and Thursday night all last month when I left services at the church, I passed the window of the rectory parlor and saw the two of them sitting shamefully close together on the sofa. Once I even saw him kiss her. She made herself a near occasion of sin to that young priest, she did."

"And did you bring a stepladder with you, Mary?" inquired another voice. "That window is a bit high for someone of your stature to be peering into."

"Well then, where is he, our young Father McBride?" Mary countered. "The Bishop must have heard of the shameful goings-on at St. Andrew's and transferred him. I haven't seen him around the parish for more than three weeks." And triumphantly she had opened the door, her eyes gleaming with malice, and, unaware of my presence, resumed the pious fox-terrier expression she wore to wakes.

The voices of the past faded, replaced by the buoyant words of my roommate Lydia: "Go ahead, Theresa." A police car had turned the corner and would surely stop to check on an old woman sitting alone on the steps of the Johnston & Son Funeral Home. Once more I could be returned to the nursing home without completing my mission.

When I reached the corner of the block, I saw the huge gray exterior of St. Andrew's Church. I stood for a moment reflecting on the comfort it had given me for so many years, its solid presence a buffer against the uncertainties of life. Before crossing the street, I offered a silent prayer that I would find what I was looking for in the church.

With an almost painful sense of anticipation, I pulled the handle of the church door. And pulled again. Someone had mistakenly locked the door, I thought, because it was no later than 4 P.M. and Roman Catholic churches were always open in the afternoons for visits from schoolchildren or people on their way home from work.

I hurried to the rectory to tell the pastor that someone had locked the church. A young red-haired priest wearing an apron with *Le Chef* printed on it answered the door. After I explained about the door being locked at the church, he replied, "It's no mistake, I'm

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sorry to say. There have been so many thefts and so much vandalism throughout the diocese that we lock the church now when there aren't any services."

"But I must get into the church, Father. I'm a former parishioner and I've been longing to see St. Andrew's once more while there's still time."

"Of course," he answered. "Come in. If you can wait a few minutes while I put the lasagne into the oven, I'll take you over."

"I don't like to trouble you, Father, but it would mean so much to me."

"No trouble at all. I go over to the church every afternoon about four-thirty to pray. I'm Father Joe Lefevre, by the way."

"And I'm Theresa McFadden."

"Let me show you to the parlor, Mrs. McFadden."

"Oh, I can find it, Father. I have many memories of that room."

"Happy ones, I hope," he called as he left to attend to supper.

Painful ones, Father, I thought as I went into the room and sat down.

We had sat, young Father McBride and I, very close together on a maroon sofa that used to be in front of the window facing the church. Too engrossed in conversation, we had never heard Mary Grimes propping a wooden milk crate against the wall. During the rendering of the "Dies Irae" at Colum's funeral, I suddenly realized how she had spied on us. She had taken the milk crate from the back porch of the rectory, stood on it, watched us as if we were actors in a forbidden movie, then returned the crate to the porch and clucked shamefuls all the way home.

We had sat, Father McBride and I, very close together on the maroon sofa because he had had terrible things to say and terrible things must be spoken quietly. Each Tuesday and Thursday evening after I had finished the parish accounts in the office across the hall, he had beckoned to me from the parlor and shed his *Going My Way* grin, as he called it.

"I'm a fraud, Theresa," he'd said. "I should never have become a priest. I don't have a vocation. I've got to leave but I'm a coward. I should have left in the seminary but my mother was sick then and I didn't want to upset her. Now she's well but I'm her pride and joy. It would kill her if I left. She promised me to the church when I was born. 'I had trouble carrying you, Dennis,' she told me. 'I prayed daily to St. Gerard, the patron saint of expectant mothers, and you were born safely and in good health. So I knew you were someone

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special, someone holy, someone destined for the priesthood.' Over and over she told me that. How I wish she had never told me that!"

And how I wish he had never told me he wanted to leave the priesthood. No one ever spoke of such things in those days. When he first told me I wanted to cover my ears and run from the room, but I stayed and listened. And listened time and time again and told no one what I had heard.

"You're such a good listener, Theresa," he would say. "That's why I decided to tell you my problem."

"But I can't tell you what to do, Father," I had answered.

"Call me Dennis," he would say.

But at that time no one ever called a priest by his first name, so I continued to call him Father—except in my dreams.

"Dennis," I would say as I stood in a forest untangling branches that obscured a misty path. "Dennis—"

"Dennis Day or Dennis Morgan?" Colum would tease on the mornings after those dreams. "I'm going to stop taking you to the movies, Theresa. A silver-screen Dennis is stealing my girl."

How could I ever have confided to Colum that the Dennis of my dreams was a priest?

The jingling of keys broke my reverie in the rectory parlor. Father Lefevre had returned from the kitchen. On the way to the church, he mentioned the names of former parishioners he had met and he asked me if I knew any of them. Most of them I did.

"There was a Marian or a Mary Grimes," he said as he opened the church doors and we stood for a moment in the darkness of the vestibule. "A tiny, frail woman. She used to come in every so often for Mass cards, but I haven't seen her for a long time. Before she left, she'd grab my hand and say, 'I never did it, Father. No matter what shameful things people have told you I did years ago, don't believe them.' Of course, I'd never heard any story about her, nor had any of the other priests, but she was compelled to make that odd disclaimer to everyone who was assigned here. Poor woman, she was probably a bit unbalanced. Did you know her?"

"No, Father," I lied as I stood at the threshold of the church.

Once inside, I opened the inner doors and waited as he switched on the lights that first illuminated the center aisle, then the main altar, and finally all the dark corners of the church. Silently, we walked down the center aisle. Father Lefevre genuflected and

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slipped into the first pew on the right. I went into the pew behind him.

My eyes traveled from the statue of the Virgin to the rose window above the altar, then to the statue of St. Joseph and back to the Virgin before settling on the candles flickering at her feet. It was there I had knelt each Sunday for a month after lighting a candle and praying that Father McBride would find a way out of his dark corner.

And he did. Drawing me to the maroon sofa on the last Thursday I ever saw him, he announced the news: "I told my mother I have to leave the priesthood. I told her I couldn't continue hearing confessions when I was a greater sinner than those whose sins I absolved. She wept but I think she finally understood.

"I promised her I'd go far away so I wouldn't be an embarrassment to her. Yesterday I told the pastor and he arranged an interview for me with the Bishop this morning. The Bishop asked me to reconsider, to take a leave of absence in May when reassignments of priests are made in the diocese so that the people of St. Andrew's wouldn't be scandalized by my leaving. But when I told him I have difficulty breathing in the confession box, he agreed that I should leave immediately and seek medical help. The diocese will take care of me until I go through the channels for laicization. All that's asked of me is that I say nothing."

"But you've told *me*," I gasped.

"I owed you an explanation, Theresa," he said, "because you helped me so much by listening. It was only because I could speak the unspeakable to you, an uninvolved third party, that I could bring myself to speak to my mother and the pastor. You've a face and heart like a madonna and I can't thank you enough."

Leaning toward me, he paused, then kissed my cheek before getting up and leaving the room.

That kiss! How it burned my cheek and troubled my spirit. I had been kissed by a man who was still a priest. No matter that the kiss was brotherly and without passion—in those days priests almost never displayed signs of affection, especially to women.

For days after that kiss, my hand strayed to my cheek as if to erase a mark imprinted there. And with each guilty gesture surged a remembrance of his lips, filling me with feelings unworthy of a madonna or the wife of a man like Colum, who was good and decent but not handsome and exciting like Dennis McBride. Often, when doing the dishes or hearing the girls' multiplication tables, my mind

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created scenes starring Dennis McBride and Theresa McFadden walking hand in hand on a beach next to a raging surf, confidently facing their new life together.

"You're not paying attention, Mother," the girls said.

"You don't seem yourself lately, Theresa," Colum said.

And I would make excuses that they in their innocence accepted.

Sundays were the worst. Colum and I would leave the girls in the chapel to attend the nine o'clock children's Mass and go next door to the church. As Communion time neared, I experienced difficulty breathing. How could I partake of the sacrament when I'd been told by the Sisters in school that sins of the mind were as serious as sins of the flesh? And how could I confess to a priest that I was in love with a man who was also a priest?

"I'm not receiving Communion today, Colum," I'd whisper as he stood to let me pass into the aisle in front of him. "I had a tickle in my throat during the night and took a drink of water. I broke my Communion fast."

Or, "I got angry at the children for dawdling this morning, Colum, and I can't receive in such a state."

Or, "My stomach is a bit queasy this morning, Colum, and I don't trust myself to leave my seat."

I'd watch him as he walked up the aisle, the slope of his shoulders betraying his concern. And I'd watch Mary Grimes as she glided up the aisle, hands folded reverently in front of her, her eyes darting from side to side to register the name of each non-receiver to whom she could assign a sin on the way home. On each of those three Sundays when I didn't receive Communion, Mary saw me kneeling alone and miserable in the pew, a confirmation of her belief that Dennis McBride had left the parish because of me.

Absorbed by the memories of Colum and Dennis and Mary, I almost forgot why I had returned to St. Andrew's until an image of Lydia flashed into my mind. Frantically, she mouthed, "*Go ahead, Theresa!*"

Alarmed that time had passed without my retrieving the object I wanted, I futilely attempted to devise a plan to be alone in the church. Finally, the sound of a car's horn gave me an idea. I tapped Father Lefevre on the shoulder and said, "My daughter has come for me, Father. Thank you so much for taking me over."

"You're quite welcome," he smiled, "and God bless."

Midway down the aisle, I stopped and considered telling Father

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Lefevre why I had really come but rejected the idea as too embarrassing. I continued walking and noisily opened and closed the inner doors, then passed through to the vestibule, where I noisily opened and closed the doors, but without leaving the church.

Quietly I went to the stairs curving up to the choir loft, climbed them, and sat down on a folding chair to wait till the young priest left the church.

Colum used to sing in the choir before we had children. "Lullabies I'll be singing now, Theresa," he told me happily when he resigned. As the children grew, his repertoire expanded to nursery rhymes, then popular ballads. "Bing Crosby himself doesn't entertain his family any better than I do," he'd boast before a song fest around the piano in the living room.

Colum stopped singing when I no longer received Communion. The atmosphere in our home became heavy with the weight of unsung songs and unspoken anguish. On the day before he died, the children begged him to sing while I finished cooking dinner, but he acted as if he hadn't heard them and continued reading his mail at the kitchen table. Without a word he left the room and went upstairs.

"Daddy must have gotten a very sad letter," my daughter said.

"I'm not hungry tonight, Theresa," Colum said when I called him for dinner.

The sad letter. Was it a bill, I wondered, or a letter from his company informing him of a layoff? Unsuccessfully, I tried to recall the letters addressed to Colum in the morning mail. Whatever his problem, I wanted to comfort him, to make him sing again. And I vowed to think no more about Dennis McBride.

But he left the house that evening without saying goodbye—and he drove the car for hours until he crashed into that tree and became a D.O.A. And I didn't think about the letter again until I heard Mary Grimes whispering at Colum's viewing:

"Everyone knows Colum McFadden committed suicide. Theresa was carrying on something shameful with that handsome young Father McBride."

After his funeral, I searched for a letter and found one neatly quartered at the bottom of the wastebasket in our bedroom. Piecing it together, I read in block printing:

DEAR MR. MCFADDEN,

IF YOU'VE BEEN WONDERING WHY YOUR WIFE ISN'T RECEIVING COMMUNION ANY MORE, IT'S BECAUSE OF HER SHAMEFUL

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BEHAVIOR WITH FATHER DENNIS MCBRIDE. IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, HE'S BEEN GONE FROM ST. ANDREW'S FOR THREE WEEKS. THE BISHOP TRANSFERRED HIM BECAUSE OF THE SCANDAL. IT WOULD BEHOOVE YOU TO KEEP YOUR WIFE HOME ON TUESDAY AND THURSDAY NIGHTS INSTEAD OF TURNING HER LOOSE IN THE RECTORY WHERE SHE CLAIMS SHE'S DOING THE PARISH BOOKS. FATHER DENNIS MCBRIDE ISN'T THE ONLY YOUNG PRIEST WHO'S LEFT ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PAST FEW YEARS. SOME WOMEN ARE SATAN'S WEAPONS AGAINST THE VOCATIONS OF GOD'S CHOSEN ONES. MR. MCFADDEN, I'M TELLING YOU THIS FOR THE GOOD OF THE PARISH AND THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH.

SINCERELY,
A FRIEND

A friend! Ah, Mary, you killed my husband. You sent him out into the night, broken and dazed, until he lost control of the car and crashed into eternity. Ah, Mary, you were Satan's weapon against God's holy one, Colum McFadden.

Deep in the night when I should have been grieving, I planned her punishment. Taking the letter to the police would have been useless. The law could seize her only if she had damaged Colum's car; there are no statutes against tampering with the soul. Showing the letter to the pastor to discredit Mary in his eyes would also cast doubt upon Father McBride and me. Somehow I had to take from her what she valued most: her reputation in the parish as a virtuous, hard-working member, a role she had profaned by using to it catalog and publish the real and imagined frailties of others. I wanted to cut off her life-support lines, her access to the private lives of her prey.

At parish meetings and services, I became her shadow. After finishing the bookkeeping on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, I slipped into church to kneel close to her. Squirming, she'd glance at me and fiddle with the St. Christopher medal she always wore on a chain around her neck. Patiently, I waited for my silent accusations to shatter her nerves, to force Mary to her feet screaming, "I did it! I did it! I wrote an anonymous letter that killed Colum McFadden!"

Mary didn't break—but on a rainy Thursday evening the loop connecting the medal to the chain around her neck broke and the medal dropped soundlessly onto the pad of the kneeler beside me. As the ceremonies ended, unaware of the loss, Mary grabbed her

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purse from the seat of the pew and glanced nervously at me before scrambling into the aisle.

Before picking up her medal, I noticed that she had also forgotten her umbrella, and I felt a grim satisfaction in a minor victory in this war of nerves. I decided that I would return the umbrella but keep the medal. I dropped the replica of the patron saint of travelers into my pocket as a mean gesture to withdraw St. Christopher's protection from her on her journeys. The medal clinked against the key-ring in my pocket that contained the key to the cabinet in the rectory where I locked the ledgers. I had intended to return it to the pastor after services.

The key-ring also held the key to the poor box, the realization of which made me change my mind about returning the umbrella. As the organist struck the last chord of the recessional hymn, I devised a plan to humiliate Mary, a plan based on the certainty that she'd miss the medal or the umbrella, or both, and return to the church.

After everyone had left the church, I went to the poor box that was set close to the inner doors. From the vestibule, I heard the murmur of a group of women who had been forced by the rain to stay inside. One of the voices was Mary's. Quickly, I unlocked the box and stuffed its contents—a few coins and a handful of bills—into Mary's umbrella, then snapped the strap shut to prevent the money from spilling prematurely. I hurried back to the place I had sat and hooked the umbrella by its handle over the back of the pew.

In order to implement my plan I had to know when Mary returned to the pew, so I hid in a confessional, leaving the door slightly open. In a few minutes, Mary returned and sank to her knees, her head disappearing as she searched for the medal or her umbrella or both. Since it was essential that the women in the vestibule be alerted to the fact of the empty poor box, its open front panel exposing the void within, I intended to leave the confessional shortly after Mary abandoned her search and pretend I had just discovered the empty poor box. But I never had the chance to play the role. From the back of the church, Catherine Martin called, "My husband is here, Mary—we'll give you a ride home."

As she waited for Mary's response, Catherine lost her in-church composure and shouted, "Heaven help us! Someone's robbed the poor box!"

Mary darted up the aisle, her umbrella dangling from her arm. "Who would commit such a sacrilege?" she cried.

It was easy to slip out of the confessional and return the keys to

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the rectory. It was easy to mingle with the crowd that included the pastor and stare unbelievingly at the violated poor box. And it was even easier to gasp with the rest of the women at the sight of Mary as she stood outside and opened her umbrella, releasing fluttering bills and coins that bounced like hailstones to the ground.

"She put the money in the umbrella because she thought we'd all have to open our pocketbooks if the police came," one of the women said.

The echo of Mary's words that night—"I'd never commit a sacrilege like that, I came back for my umbrella and my medal, but mostly for my medal"—resounded in my ears as I sat in the choir loft and watched Father Lefevre walk down the center aisle.

In a few moments the lights went out and the main door closed. By the light of the spring evening filtering through the stained-glass windows, I made my way downstairs and entered the first confessional on my right. From the pocket of my sweater, I took a nailfile and ran it behind the thin strip of wood set above the wainscoting that went midway up the wall, cupping my left hand to catch the St. Christopher medal. Without any exertion on my part, the medal flipped into my hand, the entire task taking much less time than I'd thought it would.

I carried the tarnished medal to the altar and knelt there for a short time until the police came. When Father Lefevre saw who had tripped the silent alarm in the church, he told the police that I was a former parishioner he'd brought into the church and absentmindedly locked in.

As soon as I'm rested, I'm going to return the medal to Mary. I won't have miles to go, as I thought I would. I'm going to take a short walk to Room 210. Mary was the critically ill patient who was admitted yesterday. When her children come to be with her this afternoon, they'll see me place into her hand a tarnished medal of St. Christopher to guide her on the journey she'll soon be making.

"Q"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

PATRICIA McGERR

Bob could have his wife Jill back for $50,000. If he called the police she would die. "Why Jill?" her sister puzzled. "Where could you get fifty thousand dollars?"

WE HAVE YOUR WIFE

by PATRICIA McGERR

Jill's sister arrived on the six o'clock plane and Bob left his office early to meet her. The late October days were growing shorter and it was dusk when he pulled onto the carport beside the house. So he was surprised to find that no lights had been turned on.

"Jill must have run down to the store for something," he commented as he took Ellen's suitcase from the trunk of the car. "She's planned an extra special dinner for you."

He unlocked the door, led the way into the front hall, and pressed the light switch. With Ellen following, he walked through to the kitchen where an array of pots and pans confirmed his words. But the stove was cold, utensils scattered. A beater standing upright in a bowl of broken eggs yolks added to a sense of preparations suddenly interrupted. He felt a stirring of unease that changed to relief at the sight of a folded paper propped up beside the mixing bowl.

"Ah, good—" he reached for the paper "—she's left us a note. I expect—" The sentence hung unfinished as, unfolding the paper, he saw the words printed in block capitals:

> WE HAVE YOUR WIFE. YOU CAN HAVE HER BACK FOR $50,000. WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS. DO NOT CALL POLICE. DISOBEY AND SHE DIES.

He put a hand on the counter to steady himself. "No! It's not possible. They've kidnaped Jill."

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"Who? How—" Ellen took the note from his limp fingers and read it through. "It's crazy. Why Jill? Where could you get fifty thousand dollars?"

"I can't. There's some mistake. They came to the wrong house. Or else— Oh!" The answer struck him. "It's the company payroll. The treasurer broke his leg yesterday and he asked me to pick up the cash at the bank in the morning." The factual answer provided a moment's distraction, then the horror came flooding back. "Where did they take her? What are they doing to her? If they hurt Jill—"

"Call the FBI," she urged. "They'll know what to do."

"No! You saw what they wrote. 'Disobey and she dies'! I'll give them the money and then find some way to pay the company back. I can get a loan, mortgage the house. All that matters is Jill. She must be so frightened. How could this happen? How could—"

"We have to stay calm," Ellen said gently. "That's the only way to help her. Whoever did this knows you won't be able to get the money until the bank opens. There's time to think about it, Bob. Sit down and let's try to figure out who could be responsible."

They sat facing each other across the kitchen table with the kidnaper's note lying between them. Ellen was nearly forty, five years older than Jill, but the family resemblance was strong—reddish blonde hair, clear blue eyes, even the same way of wrinkling her nose in thought. Looking at her made his fear for his wife more acute, but Bob pulled his mind back to deal with her question. "It has to be somebody from the office," he said. "Only a few people know I'll be handling this week's payroll."

"Then that's the place to start. Who has that information?"

"The treasurer's secretary, of course. But she's been with the company for more than thirty years. She couldn't be involved in anything like this."

"And the others?"

"Let's see." He pressed the fingers of his right hand against his forehead as if to squeeze out answers. "Actually, there are only three. My boss, Walt Fellowes. Leon Denton, the cashier. And the shop foreman, Charlie Ames. The four of us had a meeting scheduled for late this afternoon but it was put off until Monday in order for me to go to the airport. So they all knew I'd be late getting home and Jill would be here, probably alone. Any one of them could have left the office at the usual time, come out here and—" He suppressed a groan by covering his face with his hands.

"I know, Bob, I know." Ellen put a comforting hand on his arm.

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"But we can't think about that now. We have to concentrate on how to get her back. Since you only got the payroll assignment yesterday, this had to be planned in a hurry. That means whoever it is is probably working alone. Of the three men you named, which one seems most likely to have done this?"

Bob put his hands back on the table and shook his head. "None of them," he said. "None of them could be so cruel."

"Which one needs money?" She forced herself to speak in a businesslike tone.

"Walt has had some heavy losses on the market." Bob strove to match her control. "And Charlie talks a lot about what a struggle it is to keep two kids in college. As for Denton, I don't know much about his private life. Jill calls him the turtle because whenever the talk turns to personal matters he draws into a shell."

"Does she still play that game?" Ellen smiled faintly at the memory. "We started as children trying to pick out an animal that each person we met resembled."

"She still does," he told her. "She calls Walt Fellowes a chipmunk. Charlie Ames is a bear."

"Then she knows all of them."

"Oh, yes. We have company parties and picnics where the families get together. Anyway, she must have known the person who took her away. We've had two break-ins in the neighborhood recently so Jill's become very security-conscious. She wouldn't have opened the door to a stranger."

"And there's no sign of a struggle." Ellen's glance circled the kitchen. "She may even have gone with him willingly. He could have told her there was an emergency. Perhaps he said you were hurt and he'd been sent to get her. —But if that's true, then—" She cut herself off abruptly, but they both knew what she had started to say. If Jill know her abductor, her life was in danger. He would never set her free to identify him.

"We've got to find her!" Bob exploded. "We've got to get to her before—" He swallowed hard. "Ellen, you don't think—could he already—?"

"No." She spoke with greater firmness than she felt. "Jill will be safe until the ransom is paid. He has to be able to prove to you that he has her and that she's alive. And you're going to ask for that proof when he calls with instructions. Tell him that he has to let you talk to her, that you won't give him any money unless you hear her voice. You and Jill are so close, so connected to each other. If

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you can just make him put her on the phone, she'll find some way to tell you who her captor is."

"You're right. I'm sure she will. And when I know his name—" His hands closed into tight fists.

"Then we'll call the police," she said quickly. "And they'll rescue her."

The prospect of positive action and, even more, the hope of soon speaking with his wife calmed Bob a little. Ellen kept herself busy tidying the kitchen while he waited tensely for the phone to ring. When it did, he seized it at once and said breathlessly, "Bob Moulton here."

"Good." The voice in his ear was hollow, tinny, as if filtered through an object designed to prevent recognition. "Did you find the note?"

"Yes. Where is Jill?"

"Shut up and listen. Tomorrow morning you will put fifty thousand dollars in an attaché case and take it to the bus station, along with a roll of Scotch tape. At exactly 10 A.M., you will put the case in a locker, then go to the row of telephone booths and tape the locker key under the ledge of the booth farthest from the entry door. You will then leave the station, hail a cab, and return to your office. If the person who picks up the money is watched or followed, you will never see your wife again. Is that clear?"

"Yes, but—"

"If you follow directions exactly, she will be released unharmed before noon."

"But how do I know you have her? How do I know she's safe?"

"You must take my word for that."

"That's not good enough. I'll get the fifty thousand tomorrow and leave it at the bus station only if you prove to me that Jill is alive and well. If you want the money, you've got to let me talk to her."

"And give you a chance to trace the call? I'm not a fool. I'm at a public phone miles from where she is."

"I've got to have proof before I pay," Bob said firmly. "If you won't let me talk to her, there's another way. Her sister is here with me and if you can get Jill to answer a question about something only the two of them know, I'll follow your instructions."

"I guess I can do that," the other man agreed grudgingly. "What's the question?"

"Ask her—" he took a quick breath, then continued "—ask her what her favorite toy animal was when she was little."

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"Toy animal. O.K., I'll get back to you with the answer. Then your only worry will be not to foul up the payoff."

The night passed slowly. Ellen heated the soup Jill had left on the stove and persuaded him to have some of it with a few crackers. Later she made coffee and they carried it into the den. Neither of them went to bed. Ellen stretched out on the sofa and Bob sat in the chair nearest the phone, willing it to ring. The first light of dawn was streaking the windows when the sharp peal brought them both out of a half doze. Bob sprang to answer it on the first ring.

"The lady says it was a stuffed turtle," the hollow voice informed him. "Now all you have to do is make delivery the way I told you and she'll be on her way home."

"I will," Bob said fervently. "You can count on it."

The connection was broken. Bob put down the phone and turned to Ellen. "A stuffed turtle," he announced. "That means Leon Denton."

An hour later two unmarked police cars pulled to a stop a half block from the three-story apartment building where Leon Denton lived alone. With difficulty, Ellen persuaded Bob to follow the instructions to wait in the second car while the police entered the building. It seemed an eternity before the door opened again and two of the officers came out. Between them walked a short stocky man in handcuffs. "Denton!" Bob leaped from the car and, with Ellen close at his heels, raced toward him. "You scum!"

The man shrank away. One of the officers stepped forward to shield him while Ellen tried to hold Bob back. "Easy, Mr. Moulton."

"Bob, please," Ellen said.

But their protests weren't necessary as his rage at Denton was quickly overridden by a more important concern. "My wife?" he asked. "Is she—"

"She's fine," the policeman said. "Sergeant Wayne is with her."

Bob ran at top speed into the building and up the stairs to the second floor where the door which the police had forced stood open.

Inside, Jill sat on a couch. Beside her, the sergeant, having cut the ropes that bound her, was instructing her how to chafe and work her hands to restore the circulation.

"Jill!" Bob rushed to embrace her.

"I knew you'd come." She nestled close against him. "As soon as he asked about the animal, I was sure you'd find me."

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Another chimerical story from Robert Twohy, one which poses the question, among others: how long is a dream—especially an alcoholic's dream? And follows Dorothy L. Sayers' dictum that the supernatural in a detective story may be evoked only to be dispelled . . .

THE END OF WHAT?

by ROBERT TWOHY

Roper tossed his jacket at a chair, veered toward the couch—which was pulled up because someone was on it.

Nobody should be. He'd used his key coming in and the windows were three flights up.

The guy looked about forty, with a thin face and pale yellowish eyes that held steady on Roper's, making him feel more fuddled than he was, which was plenty.

Both hands lay in sight. "I'm not a gunman." He had a pale voice. "But a gun's why I'm here. You're going to get it."

"I'm going to *what?*" Roper backed away, then swung to check his rear. The guy might be holding his attention while a compadre slid up behind him. But everything looked normal in the light from the kitchen, which he always left on when he was out for a night's drinking. "Guns make me nervous. So do you. How'd you get in? —Forget that. Just get out."

"We have to—"

"No, we don't. I want that couch. Get off it—get out."

The guy sat and gave him the thin edge of a smile.

Roper was years out of shape and drunk right now, but he'd waltz with this dude if he had to. He came at him to haul him up by the

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ront, but found he was pawing around like inside him, there was ıothing to latch onto.

The guy still smiled. He hadn't moved.

"How do you see me?" he asked. "Blue suit, orangy tie? That's vhat I was wearing that Thursday."

Roper took his hands out of him and walked around a little. He elt fairly shaky but thought he had a line on what was happening.

"Five-thirty that evening I was shot behind the right ear. Do you vant to see the hole?" He shifted his legs and turned his shoulders ınd his head. Roper saw a black circle in the pale-tan hair, some ·ed around it.

Roper sat down in the armchair. He leaned forward and put his ıead in his palms and looked at the rug.

This wasn't good. No way was it good. But it figured. He'd drunk ;nough tonight, and thousands of nights before. He'd heard that vhen you top age thirty-five your tolerance for booze declines, and f you don't cut down the intake things can happen. Like the d.t.s.

"Do you know Albert Meade?" the guy asked.

Roper knew Albert Meade. He'd driven him in the cab sometimes. Also his wife. Why had the name come up? Roper had never had a ;hought about him, except that he seemed fairly okay for a fat cat. He said, "You're not really here. You're a d.t., and I'm talking to nyself. —Why am I talking about Albert Meade?"

"He still has the gun."

"I keep babbling about a gun."

"You see me as I was the day I was shot. I was Peter G. Broffard ;hen."

"I don't know any Broffard." d.t.s were supposed to come out of ;our subconscious, wherever that was. —Had he ever known a Brof- ;ard?

"I owned a small jewelry store on Lower Mission Street, in the Dity. We lived in Sunnyvale. I commuted by Greyhound six days a veek. Thursday, April 16, 1965, Albert Meade followed me up Mis- ;ion—"

"1965?"

"Yes. Eighteen years ago. Just across Sixth Street he walked past ne and shot me."

"He did, huh?" Roper couldn't understand why he'd picked Meade as the heavy in this fantasy. He knew a lot of guys who'd fit the ;art better.

"I'd never met him or heard of him. Commuters were hurrying to

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the bus, the usual crowd. After shooting me, he pocketed the gun and just moved along with the flow. Sylvia got the shop, which she sold."

"I don't know Sylvia—I don't think."

"My wife—much younger than me. She got a large insurance settlement. With part of it Meade was able to start his electronics company."

"He cut in on it? Oh, I see. He and Sylvia—"

"Six months after my funeral they pretended to meet for the first time. Shortly after, they were married. Now they live here in Lindenvale, in the hills. For seventeen years they've had the good life. But in three days you'll go there and take the murder gun."

"That's silly. He'd have got rid of it."

"He worships it."

"That's sillier."

"No, I mean it's become his fetish."

"I know that word but I forget it."

"It means a love object that symbolizes something. The gun changed his life—it's his god of power. When he's alone he takes it out, re-enacts the murder, strokes it, croons over it, sometimes kisses it—"

"This is getting depraved. I'm surprised at me."

"There are lots of sick people. I've watched him when he's alone—"

"Can he see you?"

"No."

"Do you watch her too?" The guy nodded. "She can't see you either?" The guy shook his head. "Does she fetish the gun too?"

"She doesn't know he has it. He told her years ago that he'd gotten rid of it."

"She was in on the murder, you said."

"She instigated it. That means—"

"I know the word."

"They worked it out that he'd do a fast, apparently pointless street murder, then get lost in the crowd. He took the risk and got away with it—you've got to give him that."

"Do I? Okay."

"Nobody knew they were having a thing, he wasn't known to any of her friends. The D.A. had no leads—suspicions, but that was all. So she got the money, Meade started his business, built it up, and they've lived in fine style for seventeen years, my murder long forgotten. Just one thing she doesn't know—that he still has the gun."

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Roper had laid his head against the back of the chair and closed his eyes.

The pale voice went on, "Sometimes people get involved in something they don't know what it's about, or what the purpose is."

"Good."

"Events have to work out so that other events will follow. All events are related."

"Do they get together on holidays?"

"That's a stupid remark."

"I know—I'm just trying to lighten the mood. You're getting too serious. Or I am. Somebody is. I'm not up to it. G'night."

"The point is that you're involved—in what, or what the end is, you don't know. Or need to."

"Good. I enjoyed the chat. I won't remember any of it."

"You'll remember. The date's in your mind—April 16, 1965."

"Right."

"This is 3:00 o'clock Tuesday morning. Early Friday morning you'll go to Meade's house and get the .22."

"A .22, huh? That's pretty small potatoes. Usually I fantasize big stuff—" Roper drooped forward and went on drooping, out of the chair, landing not heavily, blew a long sigh, and stretched out on the rug. Which was where he passed the night.

He came to feeling rotten, which was no surprise.

A shower helped some. Feeling more or less functional, he walked up the block to his old but semi-lively Pontiac, which he never touched when drinking, or hadn't yet anyway, and drove down to the cab office, thinking, Hey, kid, you're in the big-time! Your first case of the d.t.s!

Scary and weird, yes—but more weird than scary. It could have been worse. Maybe it would be next time—this could be just the soft sampler.

—That damned date! It was in his head, all right. He tried to shake it away, and it would go for a while, then come whispering back. Finally it wasn't whispering. It began a slow booming. April 16 *boom*, 1965 *boom*—April 16 *boom*, 1965 *boom*—April 16 *boom*—

Early in the afternoon he got a call he'd never had, which was to take some copy from an ad agency up to *The Chronicle* in the City. He delivered the stuff, then it was like the booming, not so soft now, was marching him upstairs to the editorial office, where he asked where should he go to check the *Chronicle* of April 17, 1965 *boom*.

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He found the story on page 5.

COMMUTER SLAIN ON WAY TO BUS

It ran three inches. Every detail matched what Roper had heard last night. All he hadn't known was that Peter G. Broffard had been forty-three and his widow, Sylvia, had been twenty-seven. No one had been able to give a description of the assailant, who apparently hurried away in the throng of commute-hour pedestrians.

Roper drove back out of the City, glad that the booming had stopped. He pulled up at a grease-joint in Millbrae and sat chewing coffee and trying to get the handle on this.

If d.t.s are visions that come roaring out of the subconscious, how had an eighteen-year-old murder worth three inches on page 5 the day after it happened got into his subconscious in the first place?

He hadn't been anywhere near the Bay Area in 1965. He'd been a kid on the bum, in the Southeast—Atlanta, N.O., Nashville, a dozen cities. Afterward he'd gone back to his grandfather's farm in Minnesota and worked it until both the farm and his grandfather died. He hadn't come West until the early Seventies. So where could he have picked up the details, all of them right-on, that the d.t.s had fed him last night?

He got up, pitched his cup at the trash thing, and told himself to stop straining your wet brain because you're not going to figure this. It's one of those things that doesn't have an explanation. So roll it in a ball and dump it and forget it—and just hope you don't have any more visits from Peter G. Broffard.

He could do a little more than that. Take a ride on the wagon for a while. It'd be a new trip, if nothing else. And he might lose some of his flab.

That night he drove the Pontiac home and strode like a man of character past the Moonduster, Pete's Place, and the scurvy trap next to his building, heated up a can of spaghetti with beef if you could find it, got it down, drank a quart of apple juice while watching *Falcon's Crest* and a few lesser epics, and hit the couch at the peculiar hour of ten. He slept through the night, not entertaining any goblins or screechers, and woke with a non-churning stomach and eyes not swimming in puddles of muck. Which put him points up already.

The dispatcher, Fuzzbuzz, rasped, "Forty-nine, you there or in the bar?"

"Forty-nine here, old carrion."

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"Pick up at 457 Sanderly Drive."

He said levelly, "Check," blowing out the knot that caught suddenly in his chest, got in gear, and aimed the cab's tonsils west at the hills, where the quality lived.

He crossed El Camino, wheeled up Castle, swung off on Sanderly, eased down the grade past four estates, and swung between two brick pillars. At the far end of the driveway he dipped past the garage and around to the low, spread-out rancher.

On the steps were a pair of dynamic-looking suitcases, and beside them the trim, sportily dressed rooster who was Albert Meade, owner of one of the more prestigious silicon sweatshops on the Peninsula, who gave a wave and went in the open door.

Roper got the dynamics in the trunk. Meade and his wife came out, and everybody said "Good morning" like small-d democrats. But like a small-c cabdriver, Roper held the door for the madam—tall, blonde, and svelte—who gave him a small-s smile as she ambled in. Roper swung up on 280 and turned off on the freeway to SFO.

He listened as they made amiable clatter together about this and that. He got it that they were off for a few days to Palm Springs to Wiggy's pad, whoever Wiggy was. They looked and sounded like any multimillionaire couple on an outing. She didn't look like a woman who had once planned a street murder. He didn't look like the bird who had pulled it off and now put in private time fetishing the .22 that had done it. All of which was nothing but d.t. craziness, which he was going to forget.

Roper swerved show-boatily to the PSA entrance. He got the gear out, a porter slung it on a cart, Roper got paid with a three-dollar tip, advised them to have a nice flight, and bugged off.

He finished the day, strode past the haunts, shoved his door shut—and saw on the couch Peter G. Broffard, forty-three years old and eighteen years gone.

"They'll be back Friday night. The maid's gone until Monday. So it's tomorrow night."

"How come I see you when I'm not drunk?"

"The house has an alarm system. Take your lug wrench and force the back door of the garage, which isn't in the system. To your right as you go in is a workbench. On the wall just under it at the end near you is a switch. You won't see it but reach under and you'll feel it. Push it left and it cuts the alarm."

"I don't see you or hear you."

"Go through the kitchen, down the hall—second door to the right

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is Meade's den. Go in the closet and look under the clothes on the top shelf. Bring a paper bag with you—wear your canvas gloves."

"How do you know I've got canvas gloves?"

"You do—so wear them. Put the .22 in the bag. Then leave."

Roper began to yell. He didn't know what he was yelling, he just yelled. He thought he might as well try grabbing the guy again what could he lose? Nothing—or gain either.

The guy just sat there, with his thin slice of smile.

Blown out, Roper paced the living room and said as steadily as he could, "There's no way you'll get me to do a break-in."

"Oh, you will. But you want a motive, so you can imagine it's all your decision. Do you believe in justice?"

"I believe in it. I don't think it happens often."

"Do you think it would serve justice to turn the gun in to the D.A in the City, tell him where you got it, that Meade's fingerprints are all over it, and he should check it with the bullet they took from my brain in 1965?"

"Probably not."

"Why?"

"Because he'd ask me how I knew the gun was in Meade's closet and I'd have to say that the victim told me during a d.t.s hallucination. That'd get us off on the wrong foot, and before we got through I'd probably be charged with fingerprint-forgery and planting the gun to cover up a murder that *I'd* pulled, 1965 being a year I was on the bum and could have been anywhere, including San Francisco He'd throw breaking-and-entering on the pile, and I'd get ninety-nine years."

The yellowish eyes gazed steadily. "Humor is wasted on me—but it's true that taking the gun to the D.A. would do no good. They've lost the bullet."

"Lost it?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The people in charge of evidence of unsolved crimes."

"How'd they lose it?"

"Things get lost. They don't know it's lost, and wouldn't care particularly if they did, but it's lost. So there's no way the .22 can be tied to my murder." He looked away. "But it's punishment time."

"Maybe it is. But if the bullet's lost, why are you so hot for the gun?"

"You're supposed to get it. Which you will. But you still want a

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reason." He fingered his bullethole in a thoughtful way. "How about money? I mean, *big* money—for travel, fine clothes, fine resorts, lovely women? Never having to drive a cab again?"

Roper said slowly, "What are you getting at?"

Broffard got up and stood at the window. "He's very rich. And of course he has no idea the bullet's lost. He'd pay a great deal, if the gun was missing, to get it back."

"Are you talking blackmail?"

"Am I? Or are you?"

Roper rubbed his hair, walked. "It's crazy. It's fantasy. There isn't any .22."

"There is. The gun that killed me."

"You're a liar—*I'm* a liar!"

"What if it's true? Travel, leisure, lovely women." His voice got cold. "You've lived like a fool all your life, drink drink drink, no tomorrow. You have an old junker, clothes by Goodwill, a worthless TV—that's all you have. You're thirty-six—what's the future? Drive a cab until they put you away in an alcohol ward?"

Roper walked around. The guy watched him. "*Am* I nuts?"

"Possibly."

"You're not lying about the gun?"

The guy whinnied, *"If I was, would I say so?"*

He seemed as startled as Roper was. He shook his head, took some breaths. "No, I'm not lying. The gun's where I said."

"You hang around and watch him make love to it. You're sicker than he is. The whole thing is sick."

The guy said, very low, "And will get sicker."

"Blackmail is sick."

"You don't have to. I was just giving you a motive for taking the gun. That's all you *have* to do."

"Why?"

"I told you. Punishment time." He was quiet a little, watching Roper pace. Then he said in his pale tone, "Travel, leisure, lovely women, fine clothes, fine restaurants, people noticing you, smiling at you, wondering who you are—being somebody for the first time. I happen to know his unlisted number. Why don't I give it to you?"

Roper got a pencil and a scrap of paper, wrote the number the guy said, and poked the scrap in his wallet.

The guy gave a light sigh. "Well! That seems to get things in order. You won't see me any more. Tomorrow night, then. —You might come out of this quite rich."

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Roper didn't say anything. He was looking at Broffard—then he wasn't.

He heard, faintly, a whinny. Or thought he did. It was a lousy sound.

Thursday he worked as usual. After work he drove home, got the lug wrench from the trunk, and slid it under the front seat. He walked past the bars and warmed up a frozen chicken dinner that he threw away, and had a peanut-butter sandwich and apple juice. He watched TV until he realized he wasn't seeing anything, then slipped off.

He woke at 1:12 and turned off the TV. He felt excitement, with a lot of fright mixed in. He'd never planned a crime, never been arrested—now he was dressing in dark old clothes to drive to a fat cat's house, break in, and steal a gun he had no reason to think existed outside of his fantasy. *Was* he nuts?

Travel, leisure, lovely women. . . Never have to drive a cab again. . .

"Just fantasy!" he yelled.

What if it's not?

He finished dressing, found a half sized grocery bag, folded it, jammed it and his canvas gloves in a pocket, and walked to his car. He drove across El Camino and up Castle, turned on Sanderly, cut the lights and motor, and rolled down the grade. Two houses had lights but things were silent. The dark Pontiac swung between the brick pillars and slid down the drive, pulling up in the garage's shadow.

He sat a minute, taking some breaths, then got out, pulled on his gloves, reached out the lug wrench, walked to the back of the garage, and quickly and without much noise forced the door—committing his first felony.

Inside was like Broffard had said. Roper felt the switch and flipped it left. He walked to the back of the house. Rapping the wrench against a window, a piece chunked out. He laid the wrench against the wall, reached in the hole, turned the lock, and raised the window. In a few seconds he was in the kitchen, closing the window.

Enough moonlight came in to show him the way to the hall and the second door on his right. He went in and saw the closet door. He opened it and inside was black. He felt around for a switch. Stepping inside, he pulled the door shut behind him and flipped on a low-power light.

There was a chest, and shelves—the top one higher than his head.

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He doused the light, went back into the den, got a chair and set it by the chest, closed the door, switched on the light, got up on the chair, and lifted wadded clothes from the top shelf, letting them fall to the floor. Back on the floor, he got them all off and there it lay—hard, heavy, somber. If it was a fantasy, then everything is.

He unfolded the paper bag and edged the gun into it. With it under his arm he flipped off the light and left the closet, leaving the door open and the chair sitting there.

He pulled the back door shut behind him, stood listening, then retrieved the lug wrench and walked to the car.

Sliding the bag and the wrench under the seat, he took off the canvas gloves, started the motor, drove without lights back up Sanderly, switched them on at Castle, and drove down to town.

Bag under his arm, he let himself into his apartment. Nobody sat on the couch. *You won't see me any more.*

He locked the door, slid the gun from the bag onto the couch, and lay on it on his elbows looking down at it.

What was it worth to Meade? $50,000? $100,000? A quarter million? More?

Roper lay there, smiling and fantasizing, as the night got longer.

Friday he was up and at work, nothing different, and no one would guess that he had anything on his mind but the beers he'd take on after shift. Which he wouldn't. Sobriety would continue a while.

They'll be back Friday night.

He hung up his cab keys and drove the Pontiac to a coffee shop where he had some kind of dinner, killing time with coffee. It was nearly eight when he finished. He walked a little bit, then went in a phonebooth, took the scrap from his wallet, and dialed. The phone rang six times. He let it ring six more, then hung up.

He drove home, used his key, locked up, got the bag from under the couch, slid the gun out on the couch and sat looking at it.

He jerked a look at the clock. After 11:00? —Where the hell does time go?

He jumped up and walked out to the booth by the train station and gave it ten rings, hung up, and went home.

He walked around, thinking, Okay, they stayed over another day. Wiggy promised a party with some particularly good stuff. Or they're home, he hasn't gone in the den yet, they went right to bed and aren't answering. Reasonable. Tomorrow'll do.

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He put the gun back under the couch, took off his shoes and socks and pants, got a blanket, lay down, and closed his eyes.

Tall woman nightgown smiles says something pulls down sheet climbs in bed—

Chairshape sailing gone heapofstuff scattering sailing gone barewood a plank two hands crawling patting bumping hardbreathing panting—

Window broken shadowface whirling phone ten times not moving—

Drawer hand something hard heavy black thinshine—

Blonde head on pillow shadowface coming down lips cheek soft touch blonde head shifts little smile—

Blast pieces red on blonde all in pieces little smile—

Blast shadowhead red pieces all in pieces round black hole open like yelling—

Roper was sitting up, the yell sounding. His yell. He stopped it.

A tap on the door. "Roper?" Linda, the little lady from two doors down. "You all right?"

"Yeah."

"I heard yelling."

"Yeah. Nightmare. I'm okay now. Thanks."

A while passed and he stopped shaking. He lay down, feeling suddenly apart from all of it.

Tomorrow he'd drive up to the Skyline and park in some barren area and walk a ways and toss the .22 in a gully and let someone find it four hundred years from now and show it around as a love object from the Red Ages.

He drifted off, thinking, sure, just a nightmare, they're not dead. They're home and she's sleeping and he's in his den and he knows it's been taken and he's got his nerves together and is waiting for the phone call.

Which he won't get. Not tonight, or tomorrow, or anytime. If Meade was alive, if he was dead, Roper wouldn't call him. He was out of the blackmail business. He didn't have the belly for it.

He went out about noon. He saw the afternoon *Examiner* in the rack—PENINSULA EXEC SLAYS WIFE, SELF

He didn't buy a paper.

He drove up to the Skyline, parked in a barren place, wiped the gun in his gloved hands, walked to a canyon, and gave it a ride,

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watching it plough into thick grass down there where it should stay a fine long time.

So that was the end of it.

The end of what? The end of nothing. Nothing had happened. He hadn't broken into the garage or the house, had never read the *Chronicle* of April 17, 1965. It was all a d.t. trip, hallucinations and related fantasies and a scary dream.

He got out his wallet and took the scrap of paper and tore it in little pieces, which he let the wind have, one by one.

At Pete's Place was only Andy. Roper asked for an orange drink.

Andy asked was he on the wagon.

Roper nodded, a shrug taking most of the punch from the nod.

Andy turned, tapped the newspaper on the bar. How about that? Meade Instruments guy killing his wife and suiciding.

Roper made an expression that fit.

"They stopped here a few times—mixing with the peasants, I guess. She was pretty. He seemed fairly okay for a fat cat—you knew him, didn't you?"

"I had them in the cab a few times." —

"No note or anything. Hard to figure. The guy had everything—you'd think, anyway."

"Yeah, you would."

It was all crazy, all fantasy, all of it. Including the notion that he'd pitched a gun in the canyon and torn up a scrap of paper. He laughed suddenly.

Andy said, "Hey! What?"

"The way drunks kid ourselves—and tell ourselves lies. You know why? To make our dumb lives interesting!"

"Yeah, well, could be." Andy had a narrow look. "But it ain't *that* funny."

Roper heard the laughter, and shut it off. No wonder Andy was looking at him like that. The laugh had a lousy sound.

He pushed the orange stuff aside and laid out a five. "Give me a shot and a beer."

He took down the shot, and the beer in three swallows, then signaled for refills. "Nothing happened."

"What didn't?"

"Nothing. A d.t. hallucination, then a dry drunk with more hallucinations—that's all. I had nothing to do with—"

"With what?"

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"With nothing. I wasn't involved." He took down the shot and some beer. His eyes got a sudden flat look, Andy thought. "Why do you look at me like that?" Roper said slowly.

"How am I looking?"

"It was fantasy. I wasn't involved. Don't look at me like that, stop it!"

But it wasn't Andy looking at him. It was Peter G. Broffard, with his thin slice of smile.

Roper jumped off his stool. "Liar! You said you wouldn't come back! You said there was a gun on the shelf. There was no gun! The gun in the drawer—you didn't say he had that! And I never threw the .22 in the canyon! I drove up to Skyline, yeah, but that was all—the rest I fantasized! The phone number—just some crazy numbers I wrote down! And all that blackmail talk, travel, lovely women, being somebody—lies, lies, nothing but lies!"

The pale voice said, "You did what you were bound to. It was punishment time. All events tie into other events."

Andy saw Roper's bunched face slacken, his eyes lose their flat wildness. The charged barbwire slid back under his surface. He let out some sighs—then got a silly smile and said in a silly voice, "Are they all related? Do they have a big Thanksgiving reunion?"

His face changed again. He frowned in a puzzled way. "Andy? Are you here?"

He squeezed his eyes tight shut, put his hands to his face, scrubbed it, shook his head, put his hands down, and said through a crooked smile, "Whuff! That's embarrassing—I think. Was I—? What'd I say?"

"Nothing. You better go now, though." Andy got a rag and turned away to wipe something.

"Okay. Sorry. I've had a weird week."

"Things get weird sometimes. It's a weird world." Andy didn't look up from wiping until Roper was gone.

Five years, he thought. No—less. Three. If he didn't kill himself some way first. Three years—then they'd put him away.

Too bad. He was a nice guy. If he could get off the sauce.

Ah, well. One guy's poison is another guy's pork chops.

He picked up the change and the newspaper from the bar and wiped away.

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a *NEW* short story by

HILLARY WAUGH

Mike Drogan ripped his partner Jake Purcell off and Mary Drogan knew it. But she didn't care. Jake was a dummy and his wife Charlotte was a tramp—if they couldn't look after themselves better, they deserved what they got.

A long-overdue debut in the pages of EQMM by Hillary Waugh, an important pioneer in the development of the police procedural, creator of Chief Fred Fellows and Lieutenant Frank Sessions, and author of over 30 crime novels, including Last Seen Wearing, *widely regarded as a masterpiece of suspense fiction . . .*

SOME EXPLAINING TO DO

by HILLARY WAUGH

The phone waked her at half after midnight and she mumbled a sleepy hello.

"Mary?" It was Charlotte. "Sorry if I woke you, but Jake isn't home yet. I wonder if you or Mike would see if he's still in the store."

Mary muttered an affirmative and hung up. Mike wasn't in bed beside her so she sat up, yawned, slid her feet into slippers, and reached for her robe.

The store her husband and Jake Purcell owned, Drogan & Purcell, Hardware, was down the back stairs on the first floor, under their apartment. Mary turned on lights and descended the doubleback staircase, clutching the robe over her bosom. Lights were on in the back room where the office was and the glow through the open door lighted her way.

She pushed the door wider and went in, expecting to see Jake hard at work on inventory. Jake handled inventory and Mike did the

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books. Mike cheated on the books. He ripped Jake off and Mary knew it. But she didn't care. Jake was a dummy and Charlotte was a tramp—if they couldn't look after themselves better, they deserved what they got, it wasn't her affair. But if it were, she'd still hold her peace. Mike had belittled and threatened her and she was afraid of him.

Jake wasn't doing inventory. He was lying on the floor beside the desk. She saw his feet and she was startled. She thought he'd had a seizure. Then she saw his head and she recoiled in horror. It was battered and smashed and bloodied and she saw he was dead.

Mary leaned on a chair and thought she was going to be sick. She looked away and steadied herself. The door of the safe was wide open, the contents gone. Burglars! she thought. They've killed Jake and stolen everything! She didn't know what to do.

Breaking the silence came the chill sound of Mike's voice, assailing her from the black depths of the store. "What the hell are you doing down here?" he snarled, and as usual when he spoke to her in that manner she started to tremble. No matter that she'd never betray him, that she was on his side, he was always suspicious. And because he was suspicious, there was a threat in his tone, a note that touched her with terror.

She turned toward him as he came through the office doorway, menace in his mien. He was wearing an open shirt and he held something in his right hand wrapped in a towel. "What's going on in here?" he said, glowering at her.

When he saw the body, his expression changed. "Good God!" His gaze shifted to the safe and to her. "What's happened?"

Mary's knees shook. "I just came down. Charlotte called me—wondering if Jake was still here."

"I saw the light on, passing by," Mike said. "I came in to turn it off." He took her arm in a steel-like grip. His eyes wouldn't leave the safe. "They got away with everything. All the books, the money, everything." He turned to her with a gentler expression. "We mustn't touch anything. I'll call the police. You'd better get back to bed." He led her toward the stairs. She was still shaking.

"Mike," she whispered, "the books. If they do an audit—"

He laughed harshly. "You mean will they find we had our hand in the till? Not likely. Not now. It's gonna be a clean slate."

Mary sighed. That was one hurdle passed. "But what about Charlotte? What about her share?"

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"Forget Charlotte," Mike answered. "With Jake gone, she doesn't get a share."

They were at the back stairs where the light was dim. Mary looked up at him with a twinge of guilt. "Shouldn't she get something? Just a little?"

She felt his fingers tighten on her arm. "Talk sense," he snapped. "You don't give away what you can keep. Not ever."

He let her go and she mounted the steps, then turned. "We've got to tell Charlotte what happened."

"Let the police tell her. That's their business. You go to bed."

As she started on, he called her back. "One thing," he told her, and now his expression was cruel again. "If the cops ask you any questions, you tell them we were both in bed when Charlotte called, that we came down and discovered the body together."

If he saw the horror in her eyes, he ignored it. "Now get to bed," he ordered, and went down the cellar stairs.

Mary Drogan did not go back to bed. She sat on the edge of it and rocked silently, staring at nothing. She was in shock. Until her husband demanded that she lie for him, she had accepted without question that a burglar had murdered Jake and emptied the safe. Now a doubt had been planted that made her sick with fear.

Had Mike done the deed himself? Had he killed his partner to prevent discovery of the doctored books, to keep himself out of jail? Mary had learned that her husband was ruthless, that he was a liar and a cheat, that he was cruel and vindictive. But that he could murder had never occurred to her.

Yet as she thought about it, why not? Didn't she stay with him through fear, not love? He could hit and he could hurt and if he did not beat her it was only because she dared not give him cause. But behind her fear of him had to lie the threat of death. She knew it now. Mike could kill.

She'd kept still about his thieving for fear of him. True, she'd enjoyed the profits of his knavery and her prayers that he not be caught were as much for herself as for him. But if he had killed a man, could she still remain silent? Killing was a crime of a different dimension. Being party to murder was not part of her bargain. And being privy to it put her at risk as well. She couldn't be safe with such a man.

Hearing the sound of his footsteps as he returned from the cellar, she crept to the top of the stairs, out of sight around the bend. He went through the office and on into the dark of the store.

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What had he carried, wrapped in the towel? She had the fearful feeling that whatever it was was covered with blood.

And what would he have done with it? She could guess. There was that secret compartment he'd dug behind the cellar wall. It was a tunnel, six feet deep, he'd laboriously hollowed out, fitting the opening with a secret panel that matched the stones in the wall. It was where he hid the things he stole—tools and equipment from the store displays, money from the till, the secret books. She'd helped him construct it, carting away the dirt he shoveled, preparing the false front.

That would be where Mike would hide the object. And if the object was the murder weapon, she'd know for sure he'd done the deed.

She crept down the stairs and listened. Mike was back in the office now. He was calling the police. It was her chance. She slipped around the corner, down a couple of the cellar stairs, closing the door behind her before turning on the light. Mike would be involved with the investigation for a long time, giving the police his story, answering their questions.

Down on the concrete floor of the cellar, she darted quickly to the secret door, slipped it from its fittings, and laid it at her feet. And sure enough, at the front of the deep black hole lay the towel-wrapped object.

As she took it out, she saw that the towel was stained with blood. Choking back nausea, she held it away from her and carefully unwrapped it. It was a heavy hammer, stained and smeared with blood and hair—Jake's hair.

She knew it now. Her husband was a murderer.

And then the door above opened and she heard him on the cellar steps, coming down on the double. There was no time to replace the hammer, no chance even to run. Already she was in his view and he was striding toward her. "Why you dirty, sneaking—" He seized both her arms and it was well he did or she might have fallen in a faint. "I've a good mind to—" She thought she was going to die. He was so angry she believed he would choke the life from her on the spot. His fingers squeezed her arms so tightly she could imagine them around her throat.

He tore the towel and hammer from her nerveless fingers and thrust them back into the hiding place, then put his face close to her own. "And what does my dear little wife think she's going to do with what she's found out? What?"

His breath was hot and suffocating. It bore the stench of death.

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She was sure she would pass out. But she had to say something. He was demanding an answer. "Nothing," she managed to whisper. She stared at his glowering face, dull terror in her eyes. "Nothing. I wouldn't do anything!" She wanted to cry but she was too frightened.

He spoke in a low, diamond-hard voice. "If you ever say one word about this, or about me, to anyone I'll kill you. Do you hear me?" He tightened his grip and she screamed from the pain. "You saw what I can do," he whispered, raising his eyes to the ceiling above. "I'll do the same to you."

He let her go, thrusting her away. "Get back to bed. This time do it."

Mary stumbled blindly for the stairs while, behind her, Mike picked up and reset the panel on his secret tunnel.

Mary didn't see the police when they came to investigate the crime. She stayed in bed, protesting that she was too much in shock from the discovery of the body. Throughout the next few hours she could hear their voices, the comings and goings of many men, and when at last they went away and silence returned, her husband came up, undressed, and climbed into bed beside her. He acted as unperturbed as if he'd worked half the night simply restocking the shelves. She, though she feigned sleep, quivered so violently at his presence that she feared he must know she was awake.

What left her sleepless the rest of the night was her quandary. She couldn't pretend, as Mike expected her to pretend, that there was no bloodstained hammer. She couldn't, as Mike expected, respond to his murdering as she had responded to his thievery. The enormity of murder was too great. Yet to betray him was to invite instant death, for she did not doubt the sincerity of his warning. Yet if she could get to the police without his knowledge, if she could prove his guilt, if she could be sure that what she told them would put Mike behind bars instantly and permanently, she would be safe.

She pondered the matter until dawn, lying quietly, her eyes closed.

When Mike rose to prepare for the day, open the store, and brief Edward, the clerk, on the events of the night before, he shook her roughly by the shoulder. "Remember," he warned, "the police are going to want to talk to you. You'd better make sure you've got your story straight, because I'm going to be listening."

Mary watched, her face half under the covers, as he dressed and left.

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What she'd have to do, she concluded, was get down to the cellar and retrieve the hammer and towel before Mike decided it was safe to dispose of them. She'd have to take them to the police while Mike, busy in the store, thought she was still in bed. And she had to time it exactly right. If he caught her in the cellar again, it would be the end. The best chance, she decided, was lunchtime. Customarily Mike went to the diner down the street for a bowl of soup and a sandwich between twelve and one.

She set her clothes on a chair over a large handbag, but stayed in her nightgown in case Mike checked on her condition. At quarter of twelve, she moved to the living room and sat on the windowseat overlooking the street with a book. She couldn't hear what went on in the store from there, but she could see who came and went.

For half an hour she monitored pedestrian traffic, the unread book open in her lap just in case. At last she saw Mike leave the store and turn in the direction of the diner. Mary closed the book and ran to the bedroom to dress.

She removed the secret door. It was still there! She put both hammer and towel in her handbag and reset the panel.

As she started up the stairs, she heard someone in the office overhead. Her heart pounded. Mike *couldn't* be back—it was too soon. She waited until the footsteps receded, then climbed nervously to the head of the stairs and opened the cellar door.

She almost bumped into Edward and let out a shriek. He was as started as she was. "Oh, Mrs. Drogan," he said apologetically, "I didn't know you were down there. I was just getting another sales pad from supply."

"You startled me," Mary said.

"I'm terribly sorry about Mr. Purcell," Edward told her. "I still can't believe it. Mr. Drogan said it hit you hard—he said you were still in bed."

Mary brushed a hand over her forehead. "Yes, but I—thought I'd get something at the drugstore." She edged toward the back door.

He was still watching as she stepped outside and she wondered if he believed her. Her car was in the yard but she dared not take it. The drugstore was too close and he would wonder. And if Mike found the car was gone—

She hurried out the drive, pausing at the sidewalk to be sure Mike wasn't in sight, then hurried in the opposite direction from the diner

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and around the corner. From a telephone booth down the block, she called a cab.

A detective sergeant named Vincent Foch and four other detectives listened with interest to Mary's story—about Mike's threats, about his embezzling, about the alibi he had wanted her to supply. They were especially interested in the hammer. While it would require verification, it was most likely to be the murder weapon. No, Sergeant Foch assured Mrs. Drogan, they wouldn't check it out before arresting Mr. Drogan on suspicion of murder. They had to act quickly. Once he learned they had the hammer, he might run for it.

Most importantly, Sergeant Foch understood Mary's fear of her husband, that she did not want to face him, that she didn't want to lay eyes on him again. As a result, she sat with him in an unmarked police car down the street when the other detectives descended upon the store that afternoon.

They brought Mike out in handcuffs and, terrible as that was, Mary felt a little better. For the first time since she had stumbled on Jake's body, she could breathe. Beside her, Sergeant Foch said, "Okay, Mrs. Drogan, you can go back home now." Nevertheless, she waited until the squad car was out of sight before she came out of hiding.

That evening it was deathly still in the apartment when Mary went to bed—still and dark. Nevertheless, it was a stillness that brought relief. For the first time in her married life, she was free from fear. She could even be proud of herself. She had had the courage to turn in a vicious killer. And the store would now be hers. She wouldn't have to share the profits with anyone.

She hadn't slept at all last night. Tonight she would sleep the sleep of the blessed. She closed her eyes to the darkness, giving herself up to the balm of silence.

There was a sound on the stairs.

She sat up and listened. Though faint, it was distinct, and it was not the flight of a mouse.

It came again, closer now. Mary tensed. This time the burglar was real!

She reached for the phone, but froze as the lights came on. Mike was standing in the doorway.

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"You!" she said, with a sinking heart, unable to believe it. "The police! They promised! They said you'd be held for murder!"

His mouth contorted into a grin. "Until they discovered I was innocent," he said.

"Innocent?"

"Charlotte explained it to them—how I'd been with her when Jake was killed." He edged forward. "The police don't believe you any more. They think you made it up about me and the murder and the embezzling to get even with me over Charlotte."

Mary's eyes and mouth were wide. "You and *Charlotte?*"

"Me and Charlotte," he said, advancing slowly. He took off his tie. "Do you know where you're going, my dear?" he asked. "The compartment in the cellar is just big enough to hold you. I made it that way on purpose."

She shrank against his approach, holding up her hand in defense against the tie held taut between his hands. "No, please," she cried.

She was heavy on Mike's shoulder as he carried her down the stairs. He was almost to the door to the cellar when there was a sudden pounding on the front door of the store. He leaned with his burden against the wall, ice in his veins. Along with the pounding came the call, "Open up! Police!"

They knew he was here. They could see the light on in the back office. But what did they want?

He knew they wouldn't go away, that he'd have to answer. He dumped the body off his shoulder and set it on the bottom few stairs, pushing it against the wall so that it was out of sight. Taking a breath, he turned the store lights on and went to the door.

Detective Sergeant Foch was there with two detectives. "Sorry to bother you, Mr. Drogan," he apologized, "but we'd like to talk to Mrs. Drogan."

"Mrs. Drogan? What *for?*"

"A matter of murder, Mr. Drogan. Since *you* didn't use the hammer on Jake Purcell, the fact that she tried to frame you indicates she did it herself. At least she's going to have some explaining to do."

"I see," Mike said. "But she's not here. I think she's left me—"

Sergeant Foch smiled understandingly. "Loyal of you to try to protect her," he said, stepping inside, "but we'll just take a look around if you don't mind."

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a *NEW* Sergeant Bullock story by

JAMES POWELL

The Scarlet Totem was a famous and useful object to the Force. The simple people in the Territory had quickly fallen under the statue's spell. Even the Indians and the Eskimo had come to believe that the rule of law in Canada would endure as long as the Scarlet Totem did.

A hilarious new story about Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, called by EQ when the Mountie made his first appearance in EQMM in 1967 "one of the freshest detective creations in many a moon." The bloom is far from off the rose . . .

THE SCARLET TOTEM

by JAMES POWELL

One day while guarding the flower beds in front of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was asked a question that made him ponder. There he stood, his eyes still askew from the flashbulb, when the little daughter of the tourist with the camera shyly wondered what he did in the wintertime.

Bullock had to stop and think. How could he describe his winter duties? Then it came to him and he said, "I'm Cabinet Ingress-Egress Officer." He was happy to see the tiny face light up with admiration.

Now, with the January snow lying deep and white around him, Bullock remembered his answer with satisfaction. He leaned on the snow shovel and looked down the Minister of Justice's driveway. And a darn good Cabinet Ingress-Egress Officer, too! Only a little tidy-up with the broom remained. And a little sand for that ice patch on the walk. Bullock filled his lungs and exhaled, smiling as his

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slow breath turned to smoke. By godfrey, he loved this time of year. Winter was the Canadian hour. And had nature come up with a more civilized sound than the scrape of the snow shovel?

Just then the Minister's Mercedes swung into the driveway. Bullock saluted snappily as the man stepped from the car, brow grave, eyes unseeing, and hurried toward the house. Bullock was giving the Minister's expensive Italian shoes the critical eye when they hit the ice patch and wobbled. The man fought for traction. No, indeedy, thought Bullock, those aren't your good old Canadian soles. In that instant the Minister's alien shoes scooted out from under him and he came down smartly on his hindquarters. The man waved Bullock back with a dark look and got to his feet unaided. He limped off into the house, muttering in a way that left Bullock thankful he hadn't taken French.

Bullock finished up with the broom and sprinkled a coffee can of sand on the ice. As he turned to go, he found the Minister of Justice staring at him thoughtfully from a bay window, a telephone to his ear. Bullock collected his broom in a hurry and returned to his car with the quick stride of a Cabinet Ingress-Egress Officer with other driveways to shovel.

As Bullock logged out at the end of the day he learned that Inspector Peter La Pierre wanted to see him. A moment later he was standing at attention in front of the Inspector's desk, hoping this meant assignment to a criminal investigation like the one into the ring of snowmobile thieves working the Ottawa-Hull area.

La Pierre was small-boned for a Mountie and had a receding hairline that gave him an impressive little brow. Bullock suspected he wore bow ties when out of uniform. The Inspector liked to come from behind his desk and walk in small circles about Bullock with his hands clasped behind his back, stopping sometimes to thrust his chin up angrily into his subordinate's face. Indeed, Bullock judged La Pierre to be a good inch shorter than Mountie regulations demanded. Not that he would have ratted or scribbled an anonymous note to the Commissioner signed "A Friend of the Force." Still, whenever the Inspector was giving him a particularly rough time of it, Bullock found himself mentally estimating the man's height inch by inch from the floor up.

La Pierre stopped circling, rocked back on his heels, and scowled up into Bullock's face. "Can't see it to save myself," he said, as though thinking out loud. "But then who am I? A lowly inspector.

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And you-know-who is you-know-what." (The Force considered it bad luck to mention the Minister of Justice by name or by office.) "He says you're the spitting image of the Scarlet Totem." La Pierre jabbed a quick forefinger. "Wipe off that smirk!" he ordered.

It wasn't a smirk. It was more a small smile of satisfaction, for in fact Bullock had trimmed his mustache to enhance his resemblance to the Scarlet Totem.

Constable Cornelius O'Reilly had passed the terrible winter of 1904 at the lonely Peter Pond Lake settlement by carving his own life-size likeness out of a single pine block with the aid of a full-length mail-order-house mirror. When spring came, he swept the shavings out the door and set the painted statue up outside to mark the RCMP post.

Later that year, when he left to deliver a prisoner to justice in Winnipeg, the statue was all the law and order the district had. When O'Reilly returned months later, five Indian lawbreakers, three metis, and an Irish fugitive from Soapy Smith's infamous Skagway gang were squatted down chewing pemmican in the shadow of the statue. And in their midst sat the Scottish factor of the Hudson's Bay Company store who, after months of staring out his window into the inflexible gaze of the carved Mountie, was eager to confess he'd been giving short weight.

Overnight the Scarlet Totem became a famous and useful object for the Force. When the Yukon constable needed to attend his sister's wedding in Montreal, they shipped the Scarlet Totem over the Chilkoot Pass and paid a small boy a quarter a time to wheel it through Whitehorse in his red wagon to quiet the miners if they turned rowdy on a Saturday night. The simple people in the Territory quickly fell under the statue's spell. Even the Indians and the Eskimo came to believe that the rule of law in Canada would endure as long as the Scarlet Totem did. Today the original Scarlet Totem stood in the Parliament Building's Hall of Honour.

"The Scarlet Totem's got dry-rot bad," declared La Pierre.

Bullock frowned. "Terminal, sir?"

"Oh, chip's fly, count on that," said La Pierre. "But they'll fill everything in, repaint it, and dip the whole shebang in a gym seal or something. No, the rule of law will last out our generation."

"Then all's well that ends well, eh, sir?" said Bullock brightly.

"Wrong," said La Pierre, more brightly still. "The Prime Minister's thrown another of his monkey wrenches into the works. The Indians are restless. 'Hey,' says the Prime Minister, 'let's invite the chiefs

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of the Indian League to visit. They've been making politicians honorary chiefs for years. Time a politician makes them honorary prime ministers.' So the chiefs'll be here tomorrow. But the Scarlet Totem's at the tree surgeon's. That could give them some ideas about the rule of law. There's where you come in."

Bullock smiled to himself. So that was what it was all about. Bullock's old half-breed friend Goodman Two-Shoes was an influential legal advisor to the Indian League. It would be as easy as pie to explain to Two-Shoes about the Scarlet Totem repairs. "Glad to do what I can, Inspector," said Bullock.

But La Pierre hadn't wanted him to speak to Two-Shoes.

Dawn found Bullock standing at attention in the furnace room of the Parliament Buildings while the two day constables sprayed his uniform with the third and final coat of clear lacquer. While he dried, the two men returned to the card table in the corner where they'd laid out a jigsaw puzzle, a ten-thousand-piecer. The lucky dogs, thought Bullock.

After a bit they came back, applied the makeup to give his face a matching glaze, and put his lacquered hat on his head. By this time Bullock was stiff as a board. They manhandled him feet first up the cellar steps and along the corridors to the Hall of Honour and chained and padlocked his ankle to a small radiator, just as the Scarlet Totem had been. Then they returned to their jigsaw puzzle.

Bullock found the assignment vaguely demeaning. He'd tried to tell Mavis, his wife, about it last night during the television news, breaking it to her gently by remarking they'd appointed a deputy Ingress-Egress Officer. Mavis had set down her needle and darning egg and given him her full solemn attention. He smiled to himself, remembering it now. Funny at these moments how he got the impression she thought he was going to tell her he'd been dismissed from the Force or something.

"I'm on special assignment," he informed her. She waited. But at the last minute he turned away, pretending to be interested in the television news item about thieves breaking into the Army's experimental station outside the city. They'd made off with a weatherized inflatable quonset hut large enough to be used as an indoor hockey rink, movie theater, or bingo hall for troops on arctic duty. When he turned back to Mavis she was still waiting with her hands in her lap. "It's hush-hush, dear," he lied. Only then did she pick up her darning and return her attention to the screen. Good old Mavis.

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Bullock set his jaw just so and did his duty for the arriving tourists. By midmorning the school children platooned in to stare up at him with awe. "Yes, I first saw the Scarlet Totem and learned its story on a visit to Ottawa with my grade-school class," Bullock imagined a future Mountie Commissioner from Brandon, Manitoba, telling a television interviewer. "From then on it was the Force for me. Great times for Mounties, my early years. Commissioner Bullock, that late bloomer, was a superb leader. Everybody called him the Old Man. Funny, but whenever I think of the Scarlet Totem I always think of the Old Man." The roof of Bullock's mouth ached and his eyes went misty.

But then the chiefs arrived, shepherded by Goodman Two-Shoes. Each wore a rose in his lapel, a gift from the jaunty Prime Minister. Bullock's friendship with Two-Shoes dated back to the Northwest when the silver-tongued half-breed had tried to set the territory aflame. Through the clever ruse of asking for some pointers on knots, Two-Shoes captured Bullock and brought him bound hand and foot to the decisive rally of his supporters as a symbol of Mountie helplessness. But Two-Shoes' attack of teeth-rattling hiccups saved the day for Canada. As the audience melted away, Bullock chewed through his bonds and arrested his man.

In prison Two-Shoes made the acquaintance of many lawyers, came to appreciate the white man's ways, and took a law degree. But he never forgot Bullock or his inexhaustible supply of hiccup cures. At Christmas there was always a card, usually with news about Two-Shoes' beautiful granddaughter Rose-Marie Many-Moons, now a successful young neurosurgeon.

If the chiefs of the Indian League seemed wrinkled with the cares of the various corporate boards and government commissions on which they sat, their weathered faces also showed they had wisdom enough to steal time from the workaday world to roam the wide outdoors. Bullock thought their spirits seemed to rise at the sight of him—or rather of the Scarlet Totem—as they passed by on their way to Room Sixteen, the Speaker of the House's private dining room where they would take lunch. Afterward the chiefs would watch a session of the House from the distinguished visitors' gallery. And tonight there would be a midnight sleigh ride.

The flow of tourists dropped off after lunch. There'd been talk of slipping Bullock a sandwich on the sly, but either the boys had forgotten or couldn't drag themselves away from their puzzle.

Time moved slowly. By late afternoon, from what people were

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saying, Bullock gathered that snow was falling and the wind had started up from the northwest. A Mountie's Wind, they used to call it. The sled dogs would start to howl in their pens and criminals would be seized by this mad idea that justice wouldn't snowshoe after them into the teeth of the driving blizzard. Bullock almost chuckled out loud, remembering.

It was well he caught himself, for standing nearby were three well dressed men. By the interest they showed in the radiator to which he was chained he took them to be successful plumbing-heating contractors. Two things Bullock found peculiar. The identical narrow black briefcase each man carried and their lifeless eyes. After a moment, the three men exchanged dull glances and marched away in a lackluster lockstep.

Now Bullock was alone. It had grown hot in the Hall of Honour. If you can't take the heat get out of the Hall of Honour, mused Bullock drowsily. Then he discovered that by relaxing and letting his stiffened uniform support him he could catch forty winks.

When Bullock awoke, the Hall of Honour was in darkness. Damn, he thought. Dollars to doughnuts the day constables had gone off duty and forgotten him. From the corner of his eye he could see through the triple archway to the dim light of the empty Hall of Confederation.

Bullock strained his ears for the footsteps of the patrolling night constables. Nothing. Not that they'd venture into the Hall of Honour at night. The ghost of Canada's first Prime Minister, old Sir John A., reeking of vintage port and wearing the ribbon and star of the Order of the Bath, was said to appear here to dance a gouty hornpipe. And those who witnessed the event were cursed to wake next morning with a blinding hangover. No, the night men wouldn't risk coming down here. Bullock would have to call out when he heard their footsteps. Meanwhile he might as well take another dose of shuteye.

Bullock didn't know how long he'd been asleep or what woke him. Then he heard the sound of metal hitting metal and a low curse. Two men were on their hands and knees in the glow of a weak flashlight, trying to detach the radiator to which he was chained from its plumbing fixtures. A third figure with a briefcase stood lookout about six feet away. By godfrey, thought Bullock, I'm being stolen! A gloat the size of a hockey puck swelled up in his throat as he imagined the astonishment all round when these guys discovered

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the Scarlet Totem was a flesh-and-blood Mountie. Then one of the men whispered, "Saw its leg off above the ankle."

But the other replied, "MacThree said bring the thing back intact."

MacThree! The name made Bullock stiffen within his stiffened uniform. If every country gets the villains it deserves, what national sin could have wished MacDonald MacDonald MacDonald on Canada? From his dour minister father MacThree inherited a droning voice, a stiff manner, and a prim little walk. His mother, a high school mathematics teacher, endowed him with a photographic mind and the fervent conviction—she was a Stuart—that he was the legitimate claimant to the British crown. MacThree lived out his lonely childhood in the grand shadow of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Young Pretender, and his father James, the Old. As a man, he learned well how to disguise his resentment against a disinheriting world. He rose high in the bureaucracy of Statistics Canada before discovering the amazing power over the wills of others that led him to a life of crime.

No, Bullock wasn't going to nab the sprats and let the leviathan escape. A plan leaped into his brain. He would let these poor saps take him back to MacThree and bag the boss as well.

The radiator was free. The lookout cradled it in his arms while the other two grabbed Bullock around the shoulders and ankles and all three tiptoed off toward the darkest end of the hallway. Bullock had to fight off a broad smile. He'd always insisted Mavis keep a certain-sized rectangle of space atop their television set free from knickknack clutter. He'd never told her that one day he hoped to place the Viscount Melville Sound trophy there, an award "presented at rare intervals for ingenuity reflecting exceptional credit on the Force." By godfrey, if bringing in MacThree didn't earn Bullock a Melville, what would? No more dangerous man had ever hugged the after-dinner speaker's lectern.

At MacThree's televised trial, the Crown maintained the man's soporific voice, dry-as-dust subject matter, and devilishly complicated pie graphs combined with overheated dining rooms to reduce his audience to a hypnotic stupor. A psychiatrist compared this effect to a layman struggling with the fine print in a legal contract who—finally deciding nothing can be worth the trouble—signs, delivering himself up body and soul to the party of the second part.

The Crown even produced a witness to MacThree's first discovery of his power. A busboy working a Knights of Columbus awards banquet had come for the empty coffee cups while MacThree held

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forth at the rostrum on the demographics of Irish immigration to Canada, 1855–1895. Calling their attention to a number worked out to the sixth decimal point, he lay emphasis on the word "attention." To MacThree's surprise, the Knights leaped to their feet as a man. The rank-on-rank of vacant, slave eyes so terrified the busboy that he fled, leaving MacThree thoughtfully rubbing his jaw.

According to the Crown, MacThree tested the extent of his powers that very night. A group of Knights of Columbus in full regalia robbed a service station at sword point and were killed in a hail of bullets and ostrich plumes while running a Provincial Police roadblock. The Crown charged that later MacThree subverted the minds of the Canadian Guild of Chartered Public Accountants meeting in convention, ordering its members to cook the nation's books and funnel vast sums into MacThree's Swiss bank account.

When Bullock's abductors reached the cellar door, they carried him down to the furnace room and tiptoed with him past the night constables hunched over the jigsaw puzzle. The secret panel in the rear of the coal-bin slid back silently. Inside was a ladder leading down into darkness. The man with the radiator led the way. The other two lowered Bullock after him on a rope.

During the endless descent, Bullock recalled that fateful December day when the trial judge allowed MacThree to stand before the television cameras and deliver his own defense complete with pie graphs. Ten minutes later a poached-eyed nation teetered on the verge of mind bondage. But a lucky winter blast blew open the back door of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation relay van in the courthouse parking lot. A groggy assistant producer inside hurled himself on the immense circuit-breaker. In the next instant an entire nation sat blinking at blank screens, chilled to the marrow by the close escape.

MacThree fled the bemused courtroom and evaded a massive manhunt. The desperate authorities invoked the Emergency Powers Act. Young people whose hearing had been destroyed by listening to rock music were armed and stationed at every radio and television studio with orders to shoot MacThree on sight. And all sound trucks, bullhorns, and megaphones had to be registered with the police. But by late spring the crisis eased enough to release the CPAs from internment, though some still said that if the night wind was right and MacThree whispered the country's CPAs would rise from bed, boardroom, or banquet hall to obey.

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Suddenly Bullock knew who his captors were.

The air had grown markedly colder. Then Bullock felt steadying arms guide his feet to the floor. The dim light from the fixtures on the rough-hewn ceiling revealed a giant hovercraft beneath a transparent tarpaulin. Part of Operation Cream of the Crop, Bullock had no doubt. In case of a nuclear threat all 264 members of Parliament, God bless them, were to be spirited away to a luxury underground condominium up the Gatineau Valley so that Canada might rise again. Beyond the craft, high aerodromelike doors stood ajar. There was how his captors had gotten in.

Bullock was lugged outside into a howling blizzard. Behind them, the immense doors, camouflaged to resemble the limestone base of Parliament Hill, clanged shut. Two snowmobiles waited on the edge of the frozen Ottawa River. The radiator was set down in the passenger seat of one and Bullock was lashed to the baggage rack. Then the two machines began their cold and noisy trip westward across the ice.

They passed under bridges, negotiated a stretch of frozen rapids, and after fifteen minutes reached that widening of the river called Lake Deschenes. Before long, a large white mound loomed up ahead of them on the ice. As the snowmobiles swung into the lea of the structure, Bullock saw it was an inflatable quonset hut. They parked among ranks of small snow-covered vehicles. By godfrey, thought Bullock as they carried him into the quonset hut by the back way, the stolen snowmobiles, too! If he could have moved his arms he would have hugged himself with delight.

Bullock found himself in a sultry room. The ice below the floorboards was wet and shining. Through an open doorway he could see a large oil heater and the corner of a stage. Clearly MacThree was warming things up for one of his speeches. And here was the New Pretender, as he called himself, puffing on a pipe covered with blue leather, a clipboard crammed with facts and figures under one arm, contemplating a pie graph propped against the back of a chair. MacThree's portly face was something of a pie itself, made all the more so by a brush cut and black hornrimmed glasses. When he saw Bullock he said, "Put it over there until I can get around to it or what have you." The men leaned Bullock in a corner amid a stack of bows and quivers of arrows and went out into the auditorium.

"Yes, my dear," said MacThree abruptly, "that ridiculous carving is part of my master plan."

Risking a turn of his head, Bullock discovered a beautiful young

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woman gagged and hanging by bound wrists from a large tripod in the next corner. A section of floorboards had been removed and a black hole cut in the ice just beneath her bound ankles. She wore a well cut suede pants suit with fringes at the seams, a bright beadwork belt, and had her hair in braids. Bullock recognized the face from Two-Shoes' Christmas snapshots. It was his granddaughter, Dr. Rose-Marie Many-Moons.

"I could run the facts and figures by you, the calculations of probabilities of my plan's success," continued MacThree, "but you'd only nod off again. And I do want you to witness my triumph here tonight. Yes, I find I want to impress you. I hadn't planned it this way. I abducted you so that Two-Shoes would be in my pocket. He has prepared the chiefs for this night and when he asks them to hear me out they will. In a matter of minutes they will be under my sway. This very evening they will swoop down on Ottawa in snowmobiles and blind the Federal beast with flaming arrows. Tomorrow every Indian settlement and reservation will follow their example. And I have many other surprises to urge on the flames."

He paused. "Today Canada, tomorrow Vermont, Dr. Many-Moons. And I want you to rule at my side. Nod you will. Or failing that, promise to moderate your language and I'll remove the gag." From outside came the sound of sleighbells. "Please excuse me while I greet my guests," said MacThree, hurrying away.

Bullock could barely control his joy. Here it was, a plot to take over the country and only he, Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock, could foil the scheme. Clearing his throat, he announced in a stage whisper, "Don't be frightened, Dr. Many-Moons. I'm not a wooden statue. I'm Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police."

Bullock chuckled at her wide-eyed amazement. "Yes," he said, "I'm here to rescue you and put the kibosh on this fellow's mad plan." He wanted to add, "And save the country," but decided that would be putting on the dog. "Listen," he said, "before I get this show on the road, I've just one little favor to ask: any way you could get over here and pry me out of my tunic?" He could tell she could not by the way her eyes flashed with regret.

Returning voices announced Two-Shoes and MacThree and a CPA wearing a plaid armband. Two-Shoes stopped in midsentence when he saw his granddaughter hanging above the dark swirling water. He swore a half-breed oath and grabbed MacThree by the throat. But the CPA clubbed him to the floor with his briefcase.

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Helping the dazed Two-Shoes to his feet, MacThree explained, "You're lucky he used the flat of the briefcase. Those edges slash like razors and the corners inject a sudden poison. So you must never raise a hand or voice to me again." Not unkindly, he added, "You and your people will soon be just as protective toward me yourselves. Come now, Mr. Two-Shoes, your granddaughter won't be harmed provided you introduce me to your friends as I've told you."

During all of this, Bullock struggled to break free of his lacquered uniform, straining his muscles and swelling his chest until his eyes bulged and his temples throbbed. When he sagged from the hopeless effort, his breath rushed out.

"Was that the wind?" demanded Two-Shoes, turning around. "Hey, the Scarlet Totem!" he exclaimed, not recognizing Bullock beneath the glaze. "So you did manage to steal it." Two-Shoes came closer. After a critical moment he said, "They could have smartened it up with another inch between the eyes."

"It'll serve my purpose," said MacThree.

At his signal, more CPAs appeared. They carried Bullock and the radiator out the door and up onto the stage, which was decked with plaid flags. Fifty stern CPAs stood at attention along the auditorium walls. The chiefs, their lapel roses wilted now, were seated around an immense brazier drinking hot rum toddies and roasting hot dogs and marshmallows over the fire. The chiefs' brows grew clouded as the Scarlet Totem arrived.

Then Two-Shoes strode up onto the stage with a quick step and a bright smile.

"Gentlemen," he asked, "when our host invited us here for a good old-fashioned feed did he instead provide us with those nothing little sandwiches on crustless bread? When he promised firewater did he give us chablis?" The chiefs all looked down at their food and drink and shook their heads. "So," continued Two-Shoes, "if this same man tells us that tonight we will see the Scarlet Totem, symbol of the rule of law, burned to cinder before our very eyes, then that, I assure you, is just what we will see." Pulling a metal jerrycan out from behind the lectern, Two-Shoes emptied its chemical contents over Bullock's head.

"Brothers," shouted Two-Shoes, "at last we have found a white man who does not speak with a forked tongue! So now I would like you to give a warm native Canadian welcome to your friend and mine, a man who means what he says and says what he means,

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MacDonald MacDonald MacDonald!" Two-Shoes led the applause as MacThree mounted to the lectern.

MacThree set his graphs on the easel and, brushing tobacco ash from his lapel with one hand, he gestured with his pipe and said, "Thank you for that kind introduction, Mr. Two-Shoes. Good evening, chiefs. Tonight you're going to get the scoop on how you've been exploited by the white man. But I'll try not to use my facts and figures the way they say the drunkard used the lamp post: more for support than for illumination."

The Indians laughed solemnly at this. Clearly MacThree had been working on his stage presence.

Bullock was more interested in the fuse a CPA had tied around his legs and was now doling out as he walked backward toward the brazier.

"And, chiefs," continued MacThree, "just to keep up your interest while I talk, you'll get to watch the Scarlet Totem go up in smoke. But not in any bonfire blaze. No, he will burn with a hard, gemlike flame, for I have much to tell you."

At MacThree's nod, the CPA plunged the end of the fuse into the brazier, where it burst into flame. Indian jaws stopped chewing. Bullock sneaked a quick lick of his lips as a sputtering emerged from the flames and crept along the fuse, up over the edge of the brazier and down to the floorboards.

As the sputter inched toward the stage, MacThree compared its progress to the coming of spring which, as he explained Hopkins' Law, moves northward at a rate of between 15.831 to 19.465 miles a day while simultaneously sweeping west to east at a rate of 61.093 to 68.965 miles a day. Only MacThree could make the arrival of spring tedious.

By the time MacThree turned to the statistics of Indian exploitation, eyes were already glazing over. But Bullock's were bright to the point of wildness as the fuse-end crept toward him. When it disappeared from sight below the edge of the stage, so did his hope of saving himself. He knew that as the flames crept up his legs he would topple like an empire. But just before he fell, he intended to shout the Mountie motto. *"Maintiens le Droit!"* Uphold the Right! Then he would pitch forward on his face and his entire body would be overrun by tiny blue flames. But no whimper would pass his lips. The history books would call this Bullock's finest hour. Though, by godfrey, he hoped the end would come faster than that.

The sputtering fuse reappeared at the edge of the stage now with

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only a foot to go. *Maintiens le Droit,* thought Bullock, gritting his teeth and averting his eyes. That was when he noticed the brim of his hat had warped. He sniffed the air in wonder. By godfrey, that was it! To get the hard gemlike flame they'd doused him with paint thinner instead of gasoline. He flexed his arms cautiously. The lacquer's grip was no more. Bullock took a deep breath and broke free. In one quick motion he snuffed out the fuse-end with his untethered foot and drew his pistol from its holster.

"Oh, blast," said the astonished MacThree.

"MacDonald MacDonald MacDonald," declared Bullock with correct formality, "I arrest you for kidnaping, the theft of what you thought was a National Treasure, grand theft of a snow vehicle, and conspiracy to overthrow your government."

The CPAs surged forward, shaking frantic briefcases to rescue their master. "Stop!" ordered MacThree. "My life is too precious to risk at this juncture. Chalk one up for the Mounties. But my day will come."

Bullock motioned his prisoner to pick up the radiator and lead the way from the stage. MacThree obeyed, and at his order the CPA guarding the hanging woman surrendered his machete and rejoined his colleagues in the auditorium. Cutting the rope, Bullock swung Rose-Marie Many-Moons to the floor and freed her bonds.

Outside, the night was moonlit and cold. The snow had stopped but the wind kept its bitter edge. Bullock found the two snowmobiles and checked the ignitions. "Back inside for the keys," he ordered, prodding MacThree with the pistol.

His prisoner shrugged as best a man with a radiator could. "It's up to you, of course," he said. "But any moment now, that whole crew will come barreling out here, hot to save my skin. If we hang around I could get killed in the crossfire."

There was truth in what he said. Bullock herded them quickly across the snow-drifted ice. The wind scoured away their footprints as they were made. They hadn't gone a hundred yards before the moon slid behind the clouds. The cover of darkness, thought Bullock. The good old Bullock luck strikes again. But after another hundred yards of stumbling into each other and wandering this way and that, he called a halt to bring his unerring sense of direction into play. He wanted to locate the Ontario shore because he suspected they would have to hail a cab and the Quebec cabbies could get snooty if you couldn't speak French.

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While they waited, shivering in the cold, MacThree tried to explain his behavior to Dr. Many-Moons. "I'm the last of the Stuarts, my dear!" he shouted against the wind. "I can't risk myself until I've had issue, if you follow me!"

"If you're asking for a date, get lost," she shouted back.

"This way," said Bullock confidently, starting out for the Ontario shore. But the chain brought him up short.

"What I lack in color I make up in ambition, my dear," said MacThree, who wasn't done pleading his case. "I will rule this planet one day. That should count for something." Dr. Many-Moons answered by kicking him in the shins. MacThree grunted and dropped the radiator.

Bullock did not cry out. The tears that sprang to his eyes froze there at once. He sucked in his breath and did a hop or two on one foot. But by the greatest exercise of control he did not shoot MacThree down like a dog on the spot.

Then a roar like a thousand chain-saws came to them across the ice. The pursuit by snowmobile was on. Bullock passed his pistol to Rose-Marie Many-Moons. "If he tries to make a run for it, shoot him down like a dog," he ordered. Then he picked up the radiator in both arms, gestured with his head, and said, "Follow me."

He limped ahead of them across the ice. But the going was tough. The radiator was awkward to carry. And why did his unerring sense of direction always lead him into the teeth of the gale? Once he thought he heard whooping over the racket of the snowmobiles. Dr. Many-Moons told him it was the chiefs. But she dashed any hope he found in the snowmobiles' receding noise. "They're making a spoor," she explained. "You make a wide circle and spiral back in smaller circles until you have your prey surrounded."

Bullock sighed, imagining his end as the gaudy cover of a cheap adventure novel. *Bullock's Last Stand.* There he was crouched down on the ice behind the radiator with an arm around beautiful Dr. Many-Moons' slim waist, his pistols ablaze, his jaw square, his uniform reeking of flammable paint thinner, while a horde of whooping Indian chiefs with flaming arrows circle about him on snowmobiles. Then real whooping and real snowmobiles intruded. "Let's move out," ordered Bullock.

As they stumbled through the darkness, MacThree shouted, "Did you know I claim the United States, too, my dear? The colonies were never old George's to lose. They were my ancestors' and now they're

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mine. The rest of the world I'll take by way of compensatory damages."

Suddenly the moon popped from behind the clouds, touching the ice with a leprous glow. The Indians saw them and whooped triumphantly. But that wasn't the worst of it. Bullock had led them full circle in the darkness. The quonset hut blocked their way. And there in front of it stood the grim CPAs shoulder to shoulder. The snowmobiles swept in behind Bullock's little party, cutting off retreat. They stopped with their motors running. Two-Shoes lit a flaming arrow, which was passed from vehicle to vehicle until every arrow burned bright. As if this was a signal, the CPAs advanced three paces and raised their deadly briefcases to the attack position.

"You have a last chance to hitch your wagon to a star, my dear," said MacThree. "No? Then you must excuse me. I've calculated the probability that a woman trained to save lives would shoot someone in the back. The risk is acceptable. Now to retrieve my pie graphs." He took the five paces to the rank of CPAs, which parted to let him pass and then reformed again.

"Damn!" said Rose-Marie Many-Moons. She thrust the pistol back into Bullock's hand and sat down on the radiator, furious that MacThree had judged her correctly.

Bullock glanced back over his shoulder. The chiefs had drawn their arrows back until the feathers lay along their cheeks. This is it, he thought. Goodbye, Mavis old girl. Your name was on my lips just before I went up like a torch.

The arrows twanged, sang past Bullock's head, and thudded into the briefcases. Wise in the ways of nature and of vinyl, the chiefs knew what would happen. The briefcases turned into sudden balls of flame, then vanished into blobs of chemical slime.

Jaw slack with amazement, Bullock looked back at Two-Shoes, who, using that subtle sign language only Indians, half-breeds, and Mounties know, explained how the blizzard winds and the snowmobile racket had loosened the shackles of MacThree's hypnotic prose.

Bullock turned in time to see the fifty CPAs break and run. Who knows why they made for the scanty protection of the quonset hut? Weakened though it was by the oil heater and the brazier bonfire, the ice might have sustained MacThree's weight. But not the weight of fifty-one. (Or even fifty, for that matter. Later some would say MacThree escaped out the back with his precious pie graphs as his men stampeded in the front.) The ice gave way with a sound like

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a thousand bones snapping. The hut bucked and convulsed, the death throes of a giant beast. The screams of the Chartered Public Accountants were hideous to hear. Then the entire structure foundered and was sucked down into the darkness and swept away beneath the ice.

Two-Shoes and the chiefs uncrossed their arms and half rose from their snowmobile seats to stare. Bullock sat down hard beside the wide-eyed Rose-Marie Many-Moons. All that remained of the quonset hut was a black rectangle on the ice. For Bullock it bore an eerie but unmistakable resemblance to the space on his television set where a Melville might have rested.

Then the moon fled behind another cloud and drew the veil of darkness across the terrible scene.

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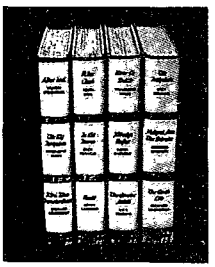

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